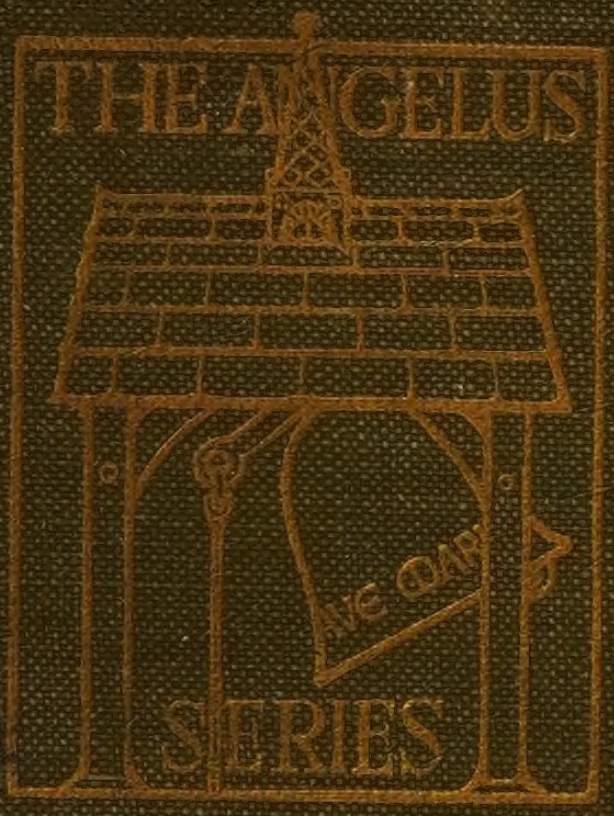
THE ANGELUS
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SERIES

ON THE EXERCISES OF PIETY

Nihil Obstat.

J. N. STRASSMAIER,

Censor Deputatus.

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The Angelus Series

ON THE EXERCISES OF PIETY

BY THE
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ON THE EXERCISES OF PIETY

CHAPTER I

MENTAL PRAYER

IN a preceding volume, we have endeavoured to give a just notion of piety, and to gain for it the esteem of those who know the value of life and are determined to make it fruitful. If it be true, as we have shown, that piety has nothing paltry about it, and that it is not a vain pursuit, a routine of sterile and depressing practices, but that it is an activity of a higher order, which takes hold of a man by what is deepest in him to lead him to the loftiest regions of the ideal and of happiness; is it not right for us to desire the pure life of piety, and is it not fitting that we should henceforth learn the holy rules that direct its impulses?

But the life of piety is nothing else than the life of prayer: in its essence, it is prayer itself. It is surely not isolated from moral life, since its end is to make us better, and since it would be vain from the moment it ceased to tend to do this; nevertheless, in order not to confuse it with the fruits that it produces, it must be said to reside in prayer. When the Apostles said to Jesus Christ, "Lord, teach us to pray,"* it was because they wished to enter into the way of piety.

Prayer is a soul's effort towards God, when she feels her dependance and distress; under the impression of her dependance, she goes to her Creator and Lord to offer Him her adoration and to implore His help; and, under the impression of her distress, she goes to her Deliverer to obtain consolation and comfort. She adores, she gives thanks, she implores, and she touches the heart of her God.

In this ascent towards God, the soul expresses her feelings by gestures and words, and then we have vocal prayer; and sometimes she concen-

* Luke xi. 1.

trates her activity within herself—"the mouth is closed, but the heart is open ; the tongue says no word, but the heart speaks ; speech is not used, but holy affections"*—and then we have mental prayer.

To speak the truth, there is no prayer that is not mental, because there is none that is not in the soul itself, and which does not express the feelings of the soul.

There are several different states to be distinguished in the relations between mental prayer and vocal prayer.

In simple and uneducated souls, the interior feelings remain confused while the mouth utters words : prayer exists in the soul—it may be even ardent prayer—but it is not definite. In those who are better educated, the forms of prayer awaken feelings that are clearer, and the mind and heart say all that the words express, but as soon as the words cease, silence occurs in souls which are incapable of acting inwardly. Others have their interior activity better developed—

* Tronson, *Manuel du Séminariste*, v^e^ entretien.

words are required to evoke it; but as soon as the flame is alight in the heart, the fire maintains itself, the soul is truly capable of prayer of a mental nature. Lastly, there are others who acquire by practice such a power of interior life that they are in activity, and contemplate and pray without the need of words; the sound of forms of prayer rather disturbs than helps them. Let us add that souls who are the best trained in prayer experience, according to their dispositions, these different states one after the other, so greatly does our capacity differ so far as recollection and union with God are concerned.

Among the exercises of the life of piety, some are devoted to interior prayer, others are reserved to the recitation of forms of words. We shall deal with both. We shall begin with the exercises of mental prayer, both because they give the impulses of piety in their highest form, and because the kind of activity which they cultivate must be the very soul of vocal prayer.

Mental Prayer

I

The Importance of Mental Prayer

Not only those who are pious, but all Christians, should create in themselves the habit of interior prayer. For the reasons that make prayer a necessity require us to cause it to spring from the depths of the soul.

Prayer is necessary, because it alone procures for us the good things which are needed by our moral life. The requirements of our moral life may be summed up in three words—to set us free from the world, to raise us to God, and to participate in the life of God. The world, indeed, keeps us inwoven in a thousand ties; vanities, pleasures and riches entice us and hold us captive; our sensualism and our pride enchain us inwardly; and, bound in this way, we cannot take our upward flight towards God. Our first aspiration, then, will be to conquer liberty of soul. Once free, the heart of the Christian must not remain inert in a kind of lethargy; but, in order to ascend towards God, it must have an interior energy to set it

in motion and to sustain its progress. And, as it is unable of itself either to become detached or to rise, it calls for the assistance of Him towards whom it tends, and God communicates to it by His grace His own life, in order that His grace may set it at liberty and carry it along, before becoming its eternal happiness.

But these are just the gifts obtained by prayer. It obtains them, because it is a humble petition as well as a generous effort.

God, who resists the proud, condescends to the humble. He allows the prayer of those who humble themselves to touch His heart; to those who hunger for justice and holiness He gives Himself as food, and He does not despise the supplication of the contrite heart. Thus grace descends in abundance in answer to prayer. In man, it will not do everything; for it is no part of the providential plan to annihilate man's activity: God intends man to fulfil his part, and that salvation shall be his own work as well. But, without grace, man could do nothing, and could not even utter a word of prayer. In this way, grace is poured into the

Christian's heart, like a store of mighty energies; it is for him to make use of them by converting them into work.

This is what the Christian does in the very act of praying; for this act involves more than a petition, it is already an effort as well. Consider, indeed, the interior impulse of a soul in prayer. The desire itself is an inner prompting, an ascent towards God, a bringing of all the faculties into harmony with the will of God. Have you not felt that prayer itself is an unfathomable work, and that it transforms you in proportion to the way in which it expresses itself, and that you come from it quite other than you were when you began it? What a horror you conceive of sin! How you thrust the occasions of sin far from you! With what energy do you burst your chains, and what liberty you secure for yourself! What love of God kindles within you! How splendid appears the ideal of holiness to you! And how obedient are all your powers in being directed towards the end of your aspirations! Are you not then under the sway of grace, collaborating with God with your

whole soul? And do you not see that the new man, who will be manifested outwardly, will be merely the revelation of the silent transformation that prayer has slowly wrought within.

If such is prayer, if such are the results it ought to bring about, who can fail to see that it is a form of action, but of an action that takes place entirely within? Hence it is by nature something inward or mental. What would be the use of forms uttered by the lips, if, at any rate implicitly, the petitions had no inward expression, and if the heart did not co-operate? Hence, progress in prayer does not consist in the frequent repetition of forms, but in the duration and intensity of the interior labour. The longer and the more completely you submit yourself in the secret sanctuary of the soul to the Divine action, the more you will feel the efficacy of your prayer.

The value of mental or silent prayer depends upon two things.

The first is this, that when the lips are silent, the activity becomes more intense within the soul, because the attention is undivided. Here we are

not speaking of those whose attention is only sustained by speech, but of persons of habitual inward prayer, who have grown accustomed to interior action and to listening to God in the voice of conscience.

The second is this, that prayer which is mental becomes more individual, and thereby more active As long as we use vocal prayers, we are the slaves of forms of prayer, and our feelings inevitably follow the path laid down by the writer of the words ; and thus we undergo a certain amount of restraint. Mental prayer restores our liberty ; our heart gains its own initiative thereby ; they are its own thoughts and feelings that it expresses ; it really prays. Sometimes the heart passes, owing to its manifold needs, through the most diversified feelings ; sometimes it stops at a point which touches it in an especial manner, and allows some more salutary impression to penetrate it. It waits in God's hand, and lets itself be moulded by Him in all tranquillity. It is impossible to tell all the profit that comes to a soul from these free and intimate confidences with God.

Let us say, in conclusion, that mental prayer is necessary. And to what extent? It is difficult to speak definitely. But those who are pious are not accustomed to make such calculations; they give themselves to mental prayer in proportion to the time at their disposal, and to the attraction that they feel.

II

Different Forms of Mental Prayer

The day of a person of piety, whether in the world or living in community, involves several exercises in which mental prayer dominates.

The first, which takes place at the earliest hour, and before any work begins, is called the mental prayer of meditation. It is with this inward prayer that every morning of the life of piety commences. Contemplative prayer is less a definite exercise than the starting of the religious life which should animate all our actions throughout the day. Usually it follows immediately after the morning prayer; and it is a good thing to keep to it, for the proverb reminds

us that a prayer deferred is a prayer omitted. As to its duration, that will depend upon circumstances; it is fixed for those who live in community; those who are at liberty settle it in accord with their spiritual director, and according to the duties of their state of life. Be the time long or short, the important thing is to be faithful to it, in spite of the temptations of laziness or distaste.

Holy Mass enters into the life of piety as an essential element; it is not an exercise, it is the central act of religion, the act towards which converge all the exercises of the day. For the priest, the Mass is filled up with all the liturgical prayers; to him, it is not a subject for contemplation, but an action—the act of sacrifice. The faithful are more at liberty; sometimes they will recite the prayers of the Missal along with the priest, a practice which is much to be recommended, and most useful for the renewal of piety; sometimes they follow the prayers and acts of sacrifice inwardly, uniting themselves with the intentions of the august Victim, offering themselves to God

as a holocaust. Attendance at Mass then becomes a mental prayer, and carries out the deep work of contemplative prayer.

The thanksgiving after Communion is again an interior prayer. For if it is permissible to repeat some vocal prayers at such a time, if the priest who is celebrant is bound to say the *Benedicite*, the great part of the time should be taken up with colloquies with the Divine Master. The corporal presence of our Lord, by reviving faith, makes interior activity easier. In these happy moments, a fervent soul receives from the Master's heart light and strength for the rest of the day.

Nevertheless, pious souls, if they have the time to spare, like to return to the feet of our Lord and to visit the Blessed Sacrament. For at least a quarter of an hour, they come to It for mental prayer in the evening. Reading may find room here, and also vocal prayers; but in this evening recollection, the hour is peculiarly fitted for intercourse with the Divine Occupant of the Tabernacle. The visit to the Blessed Sacrament is, then, a manner of mental prayer.

Further, this interior prayer should be uninterrupted. It begins in the morning, and it is followed up all day. This *vital prayer*, as it was called by St. Francis of Sales, consists in the continuous union of the soul with God through all our occupations. It shows us God in those who converse with us, and it makes us carry God with us wherever we go; in circumstances or in men, it is He whom we meet, and He it is whom we express. By this sweet and continual thought of God, our days pass in a warm atmosphere of mental prayer. Ejaculatory prayers, or cries of the heart, revive it from time to time, but it never dies.

III

A General Method for Mental Prayer

At whatever time of the day we pray, and however short our prayer has to be, some method is necessary, either to stir us to pious feelings, or else, to express them profitably. The method we propose has the merit of being simple and easy to remember,

and of containing the substance of such as are best known.

The preliminary of all prayer consists in putting ourselves in the presence of God, and of being penetrated with the feeling that He is there before us, surrounding us with His immensity, living at the bottom of our consciences, and that He admits us, sinners as we are, to converse with Himself, because He loves us more fervently than He hates our defilements. We adore Him, we beseech His pardon, and we implore His help in order to pray.

Coming, then, to the subject-matter of our prayer, we bring to bear upon it our eyes, our hearts, and our hands; our eyes to consider it our hearts to get the grace of it, and our hands to carry it out in practice.

Let our eyes first dwell long on the types, in which we find a living illustration of the subject of our meditation: on God, on Jesus Christ, on the saints. Above all, let us fasten our attention on our Saviour; He is the Master, all of whose lessons we shall never learn. Let us fill all our faculties, our senses, our mind, and our will, with Him, His thoughts

and words. Let us spend a long time in His presence, until we are permeated with His rays. As to each matter, let us ask: What has He thought about it? What has He said of it?

While our eyes are thus fastened on Jesus Christ, the heart is not slow to come into play. Two feelings then stir it—desire and confusion. The heart desires to resemble the Divine model which it has been contemplating; it desires it all the more ardently because meditation provides it with several grave reasons for wishing for this resemblance. It is in confusion at the state in which it sees itself, so far from being what it ought to be; called to be so great and so holy, it blushes to find itself so mean and so sinful. And, then, from this heart immediately springs prayer, sometimes urgent and passionate, sometimes calm and sweetly abandoning itself to God. For if there are times in which the heart sends cries of distress up to God and speaks to Him in the accents of burning love, there are also times in which it says to Him trustfully: "Lord, I am Thy humble

creature; I place myself in Thy hands; mould me as Thou wouldst; in all I cast myself upon Thee."

When the heart has prayed, when it has undergone the fructifying influence of grace, when it has drawn strength from the Divine fountain, the hands in turn are offered to fulfil the Will of God. It is not being virtuous to have in one's heart and mind the picture and the feeling of holiness; the hands must be brought to action. This is why prayer ends in definite resolutions: "This, O God, is what I will do to-day to please Thee." But resolutions are only a good intention; it is practice that gives them their value and merit. Prayer is thus followed up throughout the occupations of each day, and is only completed by being faithful to the resolutions made in the morning.

When our prayer is over, we thank God for His help, we entrust to the Blessed Virgin the graces we have received, and we keep some word in our memory as the impression left on our soul by our meditation.

IV

Conditions of Success for Mental Prayer

Mental prayer presupposes much liberty and activity in those who practise it. Liberty is acquired by mortification, and activity is maintained by struggles against idleness or distaste.

A soul can only pray on condition that she remains within herself and dwells there in silence and solitude; if she goes astray and becomes externally distracted by allowing herself to be dissipated, she will find neither God nor her own heart; if she allows the tumult of the world or sensualism to penetrate her, she will hear neither the word of God nor the voice of her own needs. It appertains to mortification to make the soul master of herself, to tear her away from the enticements of the world by the restraint of the senses and by the love of solitude, and to withdraw her from the exigencies of sensualism by the application of the mind to serious thoughts. Thus set at liberty, the

soul will easily yield to the tendency which inclines her towards God; and habitual recollection will make mental prayer easy.

But this liberty will only be of advantage to her on condition that its activity is won and sustained—won by faithful preparation and sustained against various causes of discouragement.

To make no preparation for prayer is to abandon one's soul to impressions which may spring up capriciously either within or from without. The object of preparation is to set in the soul a definite object on which all the faculties will engage, around which thoughts and feelings will gather. It is to do disrespect to God, if we come into His presence without taking forethought as to the subject to be dealt with in our converse with Him, and it is reducing our piety to a sterile formalism to fulfil in this empty manner its principal exercises. The preparation is made the night before for the morning prayer, and it may be brought to bear upon all the mental prayers of the day; for we multiply the fruits of our prayers when we devote a whole

day to pursuing one end. This preparation consists in the choice of a subject, then in reading a few lines or pages about it, and lastly, in a rapid survey of the three following questions: What are the feelings of our Lord as to this virtue? How am I to obtain His grace for it? What am I to do to make this virtue enter into my life? When the hour of prayer comes, the mind is no longer left to chance; from the outset, the soul pursues a well-marked path, and can make progress in it.

We must, however, resist temptations to idleness and distaste. We shall use the help of books of vocal prayers, until we have got control of our minds and kindled our hearts; the beginning of prayer, like the beginning of all work, cannot be made without effort. We shall be persuaded that the hours given to prayer are the most fruitful times of the day; and if we are busy, far from neglecting the duties of our state of life on account of prayer, we shall find it helps us to fulfil them all the better. We shall keep these blessed hours sacred and inviolable, and even if we feel that we are making no

progress, because we experience no relish for them, we shall nevertheless continue faithful in mounting guard daily at God's gate, and in saying to Him: "I am here."

CHAPTER II

VOCAL PRAYERS

I

The Importance of Vocal Prayers

TRUE prayer is assuredly that which comes from the soul, and not that which is uttered by the lips. But there must be prayer on the lips in order that prayer may rise within the heart. Note fervent souls in whom interior prayer never ceases. Far from despising forms of prayer, they frequently have recourse to them. The long prayers of the liturgy are their sustenance. Frequent and bold ejaculatory prayers are the spontaneous outbreak of hearts that cannot be silent.

But if, on the other hand, a soul becomes neglectful of vocal prayers, at once her piety decreases. Just as a person's constitution seems to waste away if it does not take nourishment,

and as the fire dies out for want of fuel, so does interior religion slowly perish in souls who, from spiritual idleness or from a vain disdain of exterior practices, hinder their life of piety from increasing by exercise and by the use of sensible outward helps.

On the contrary, when our interior piety needs reviving, have we not all experienced the supreme efficacy of vocal prayer? Let us recall the hours when we were cold and had lost our taste for God, when the heart was torn asunder with a thousand cares and the mind engrossed and obsessed with preoccupations: we wanted to pray, and prayer would not come into our souls. Then we knelt down and fastened our eyes upon the Crucifix and repeated forms of prayer, and as we were pronouncing the words, we regained possession of our heart, the mind was torn away from its distraction, and prayer revived, as a dying fire is rekindled by a breath. Just as in a dim sanctuary one sees the lights slowly burn up into flame during the hour of Benediction, so the most heavy-laden soul awakens, gets illumined, and takes fire in interior

prayer through the continuous use of pious formularies repeated with faith and tenacity. This is why, when a soul has to be cured of a distaste for prayer, instead of reasoning in vain, one has to say quite simply: "First of all, pray; soon the taste for prayer will return to you."

This property of vocal prayer depends upon several things. To begin with, vocal prayer is an activity that stirs the whole man and awakens him inwardly from slumber, for the effort made to go on praying just the same only reaches the lips after having aroused the will. In the next place, vocal prayers contain thoughts and feelings that take possession of the soul from without, and destroy in her the sense of emptiness and of desolation which gives rise to the distastefulness; they therefore relieve the poverty of heart, which henceforth gives a joyful adhesion to the affections with which it feels that it is filled. Lastly, God reserves special blessings for those who seek Him in the midst of dryness. He loves to give light to those who call upon Him through the darkness, and takes pleasure in shedding His favours

on those who do not leave Him in their desolation.

From this point of view, our attachment to formularies has nothing superstitious in it. In the eyes of well-instructed Christians, they have no magical or cabalistic power. We do not believe that such and such a prayer, of itself, repeated at a certain hour, or on a certain day, must necessarily produce a predetermined external effect, such as to preserve us from lightning, or keep off some contagious disease, or cure an infirmity, or guarantee the success of an examination or of some undertaking, for such beliefs are generally the remains of paganism. Certainly, we know that God is good enough to manifest His power at the time of the use of the fitting formularies, and we know that in the Sacraments, the formularies are themselves efficacious. But the enlightened Christian knows that such is not, ordinarily, the will of God. The formulary is surely good, but it is good because its effect is to move our hearts to prayer. This interior prayer, springing from the use of the formulary, is the first grace of God's. By this prayer,

the heart obtains what it asks for: it obtains directly that which makes it better—more faith, more charity, more patience, more energy, and so forth: it obtains indirectly also the external graces which it rightly aspires to, either because it enters the outward fray stronger and better prepared, or else because God in His fatherly mercy gives His aid.

If, then, our vocal prayers have such a far-reaching effect, how highly should we value them!

II

The Choice of Vocal Prayers

Amidst the innumerable forms of prayer that are presented to us, a choice has to be made, for they are not all of equal merit, and, moreover, our piety itself requires us to avoid an embarrassing multiplicity. A few vocal prayers that are excellent in themselves, which are dear to us and often on our lips—such must be our rule in practice.

In the front rank we put the prayer which Jesus taught us, the admirable "Lord's Prayer," which is so visibly

stamped with its Divine origin in its perfect adaptation to all the needs of the soul; exhausting and expressing all the desires of man's heart, this prayer will remain living and new to the end of time. It is summed up in the words of Jesus in His agony in the garden: "Father, not what I will, but what Thou wilt"; and in that other word spoken on the Cross: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Such forms of prayer never tire the lips that repeat them; they fill the heart with their plenitude, and their sane vigour uplifts the will to God.

Next come prayers inspired by the Holy Ghost, and found in Holy Scripture. The Psalms are the best known of these. In these sublime songs, so great in poetry, prayer has accents of incomparable beauty; sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes supplicating, it finds its way to our souls when we are most humble and penitent, and filled with awe and confidence. Who does not feel his whole being thrill in the Psalms of penitence, especially in the *Miserere*, the words of which are composed of tears and repentance? It was

quite right of the Church to make these songs the substance of her official prayers.

There are others that the Church has herself composed and introduced into her liturgy ; there are the hymns and collects, the prayers of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and, above all, the *Ave Maria*, in which the words of the Angel have been so happily completed with a supplication that all generations of Christians have recited, and still recite, with love. If the angelic salutation is popular, especially owing to the Rosary, it is not so with the other formularies used by the Church ; the faithful are not well enough acquainted with these prayers written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and by means of which the humblest Christian can enter into communion with the thoughts and desires of religious gatherings throughout the world.

Lastly, there are others which, without forming part of our public prayers, have yet been approved by the Church, and usually enriched with valuable indulgences ; such are the litanies of the Holy Name of

Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Sacred Heart, and the morning and evening prayers adopted in various dioceses, and so forth. They afford an almost infinite variety of feelings and thoughts and expressions, and, from this table spread with wholesome and nourishing dishes, each can take the food best suited to his temperament and needs. None of these prayers is obligatory; but neither is any of them to be despised. When we choose those that go best with our own spiritual tendencies, we must not despise those that we relish less.

Must we confine ourselves to the prayers already made, or have we not the right to compose, for our part, such petitions as shall express our feelings and needs in the most living way? Provided that we keep our respect for received prayers, and that we say nothing that is not in accord with the spirit of the Church, there will surely be every advantage in our possessing forms that are more our own, and which have the power of touching our hearts more nearly, and of uplifting us to God.

III

How to Act in Vocal Prayers

If formularies are profitable to us in proportion to the way in which they awaken interior prayer within us, it follows that the repetition of them must not be mechanical and lacking in attention. If they were said in a merely material manner, with no other anxiety than to utter them without missing anything, they would be hard labour, and not a benefit to the soul. Therefore the soul must pray while the lips are speaking.

Certainly the ideal would be realized and the soul would always pray, if attention were always maintained, each word calling forth a corresponding thought or feeling in the soul. It is also preferable to repeat fewer words, in order that the heart may have the time to ponder them and to adapt itself to their meaning. But such a strain on the mind would overdrive it harshly, because of the swift succession of thoughts and different impressions;

and it practically becomes impossible, when long formularies, like those of the Breviary, have to be recited in a limited time. They then pass too rapidly across the field of the soul to make an impression upon it. Often, too, their meaning escapes the comprehension of minds of merely moderate education. Method is thus required to transform such recitation into prayer.

The best plan, in my opinion, consists in fixing one's attention on some fruitful thought drawn from the very object of the prayer. Suppose I have to recite the Office of the Annunciation. Before beginning to do it, I should take a few moments for reflection, during which I should picture to myself the Angel's visit to the Blessed Virgin, and I should recall the words exchanged between them, and consider what a benefit the mystery of the Incarnation was to mankind, and so forth; filled with these thoughts and the feelings they evoke, I should pray to God to accept all the words of the Office as the expression of my adoration, gratitude and supplication; thus uplifted by meditation on the mystery, all the

formularies become my prayer. In the same way one can dwell in mind on the moral personality of a saint, on the necessity of a virtue, on the sense of some urgent need; each word then becomes an expression of the one prayer that stirs the activity of the soul.

But let us suppose that our impotence in fixing our attention is greater still; that we are weak in mind, suffering from brain-fag, or that our whole soul is obsessed with inevitable distractions, prayer is still possible despite our infirmities. Before beginning our recitation we shall say to God in all simplicity: "Lord, Thou knowest the poverty of Thy servant; Thou knowest the feebleness of his will, the levity of his mind, the inconstancy of his heart, and, therefore, how great is his difficulty of keeping himself in Thy presence; but Thou knowest also, that in the depths of his heart, he loveth Thee, and desireth to pray to Thee; accept, then, as my intended prayer, all that is meant by the words I am about to utter, for I abandon myself to Thy Spirit that He may speak them to Thee by my lips."

God is our Father ; He knows better than we the wretched clay of which we are made, and He will bless—let us not doubt it—prayers begun in such a spirit of self-surrender. Thenceforward, it is not us, but Jesus Christ living in us, that He will hear.

May these observations persuade the reader that vocal prayers, which are so necessary for the interior life, need not be said hastily nor in great numbers, but gravely, with recollection, in union with our Lord, without any regard—except in the case of the Breviary—to the length of what is recited.

CHAPTER III

THE LITURGICAL OFFICES

I

Their Meaning and Necessity

WHATEVER leaning a man may have towards piety in solitude, if he be a true Christian, he will not confine himself to it, so convinced will he be that such isolation will be fatal to him. He attends his parish church, and takes his part in the liturgical offices. Not satisfied with the Low Mass at which he communicates, he attends High Mass and Vespers when he can do so. He is not ashamed of taking his place, and of carrying a light, in the processions of the Blessed Sacrament. He goes humbly, year by year, to receive the blessed ashes on his forehead. During Holy Week he goes to get his blessed branch, he makes his visit to the Tomb, and he kisses the

Crucifix on Good Friday. In a word, he is associated with the mysteries and solemnities celebrated by the Church. His religion does not remain individualistic, it becomes social. And he binds himself to participate in these external ceremonies, both for the sake of the good he receives from doing so and for the example that he sets.

The first advantage that he gets comes from the very nature of external worship. Is there, indeed, anything more touching, is there anything more like the pure joys of heaven, than the majestic ceremonies unrolled beneath the arches of our sacred fanes?

Even in our smaller churches, the breadth of the proportions, the fineness of the lines, and the ruling silence of recollection, grip and uplift the soul. The sacred pictures, the great crucifixes, and even the glow of the lights and gleam of the gold—all help to catch the eye and to fix it upon religious symbols that represent our adorable mysteries. Then the voices rise, the chants resound, sometimes solemn, sometimes more full of animation, but always worthy, and

they stir all one's feelings to happy emotion ; and the impression remains so deeply imprinted that, even to advanced age, and in distant exile, these chants return to the memory and awaken the fruitful thoughts of the best years of one's life. And what is experienced by one is felt by each of his neighbours; and from feeling in unison, hearts beat more at ease; and the emotion of each is increased by the emotion of all, and it ends by reaching such a degree of heat that it melts for ever the ice of human respect. Holy, happy hours, and truly heavenly, are these hours of the liturgy; those who have tasted them once forget them never; and the hymns heard then haunt the memory to one's last breath. When, after long wanderings, a man returns to the faith of his earliest days, and to the God of his first Communion, it is because the flame of Christian belief has suddenly leapt up from memories slumbering in the living depths of his heart.

The liturgical offices have, besides, the advantage of being fuller of God. If Jesus has promised to be present wherever two or three are gathered

together to pray, all the more will He be a living presence amongst the faithful met together for the prayers of the Office. In our divine offices, they are no longer men who pray in isolation, it is the Church herself who comes into play, it is the Holy Ghost Himself who adores and supplicates by our lips. Wherever there are Catholic churches the same words are uttered, the same signs are seen, the same praise resounds, the same supplication rises, and the same Spirit of Jesus prays in all. What incomparable beauty there is in this one and universal prayer, which all Christian hearts vie with one another in repeating! Who would hold aloof from this immense concord? How mean are our individual prayers compared with this vast cry of distressed humanity, re-echoed by the same Spirit—infinitely through the whole of heaven! How one loves to take part in the chant of Mass or Vespers, when one knows by faith that one's voice goes to swell the praise of the whole Church!

Add to this consideration the fact that our liturgical offices surpass all other prayers in the beauty of the

words which are uttered in them, and of the acts that are performed. In fact, what can be more sublime than the Psalms? what more sweet than the hymns? what more filled with piety than the prayers? what more dogmatic than the liturgical expressions that abound in the Mass? what possess a higher morality than the example of the Saints whose excellencies are set before us? All the illumination of the faith and all the thoughts of holiness permeate our souls under the influence of the sacred liturgy.

Further, our divine offices are less prayers than religious dramas that the Church enacts before our eyes. Holy Mass enables us to be present at the august Sacrifice of the Cross, announced by the Prophets, prepared for by the preaching of Jesus, and consummated on Calvary. Our Vespers, which are too little understood, re-echo the celestial chants in our midst. They begin with the Psalms of God's ancient people, they continue with the beautiful hymn of the Blessed Virgin, the *Magnificat*, and they end with the hymns and prayers of the new dispensation. The

charming episode of the Purification of Mary lives again in the animated ceremonies of Candlemas; the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is made realizable to us in the affecting feast of Palm Sunday. And who can help admiring the poetry and life of the liturgical feasts, when they are compared with the commonplace and symbolically meaningless gatherings with which some people endeavour to replace them? Should we not do better to explain to the people the deep meaning of our traditional offices instead of creating new ones which are lacking in the spirit of the past?

Besides the priceless benefits that they procure to those who attend them, the liturgical offices are also a means of propaganda. The Christian who goes to them with regularity is a fruitful example to his brethren.

To follow High Mass with devotion, and also Vespers in the parish church, is to make a public profession of one's faith. The prayer you offer up in the depths of your heart or in the privacy of your house is not a missionary prayer: it is certainly good for your own soul, but it does

not persuade other souls to pray. The Mass you attend in the early morning or in some private chapel certainly enables you to participate in all the riches of the Sacrifice of the Cross; but it has not the power to encourage the fearful, to overcome human respect in the weaker brethren, and to proclaim your faith openly. If it be true that religion in these days has no worse enemy than human respect, there is no more effectual way of defending it than to advertise it prominently by being faithful to the liturgical exercises.

No doubt it must be taken for granted that certain delicate situations call for a certain amount of prudent reserve. But, nevertheless, it is important not to take an exaggerated view of what is required in such cases, and not to encourage them to become tyrannical by giving in prematurely. But, apart from such exceptional cases, it is the duty of every good Christian, without either being a prig or a coward, to confess his faith openly and to do honour to his religion by public participation in the offices of the Church. Let us hope that the young, especially in the

country districts, may be enrolled after first Communion, with a promise to come, whenever they can, to High Mass and to Vespers.

II

How to behave at them

These offices, however, will not be loved and observed if the faithful are allowed to get tired of them, and if those who attend do not understand and take an interest in them and take part in them.

Therefore the faithful must be more than mere spectators, for if they only look and listen and take no active part in them, they will soon be filled with distaste for them. Fifty years ago, when it is acknowledged that the faithful were closely packed in our churches, but were strangers to what was going on in them, it might have been foreseen that before very long the churches would be empty. Outside work was urgent, and pleasure was appealing to them; and within, weariness was overcoming them, and the sense of having nothing to do pervaded them.

In consequence they remained outside. In order to keep those who remain, let us give them something to do.

What, then, are the faithful to do during the sacred offices?

Most of them read or pray while the Office is going on in the choir. While the priests and the singers are carrying out the liturgical worship, the people follow from a distance what is taking place, and fulfil for their part their religious duties. The less educated recite the Rosary; others are engaged in pious reading; and those who have the greatest faculty for interior prayer meditate and unite in the prayer of the Church from the bottom of their hearts. But this prayer is not theirs; the liturgical Office is not their office. There are two groups in the church—the choir where the Office is celebrated, and the nave, where individuals enter separately into communion with God. What is in the mind of the Church does not take place.

It is the work of the parish priest to break down this dualism. He should begin by instructing the faithful in the nature of the sacred

offices and in the proper way of taking part in them. He will advise those who cannot read to join in voice with the choir in the chants, and to fill up the intervals of silence by uniting in the prayers offered by the priest. Those who can read he will urge to bring a book to the holy offices, not a religious book of no matter what sort, but a book which contains the liturgical prayers; he will invite them to sing with the choir and to repeat the same prayers as are said by the priest; he will admonish them that no prayers are as good as the liturgical forms of prayer, which are inspired by the Holy Ghost, and said at the same time throughout the whole Church.

This is not the place to explain how to train a parish in the liturgical chant. We will only say that it ought to be attempted, if one wishes to unite all the faithful by means of the chant in one prayer, and that, if the children get used to it by several years of continuous practice, in the end all the faithful will be led on to take it up.

Let the diocesan official Prayer-Book be the book *par excellence* for

everyone. Those who have time to read may next take Dom Guéranger's "Liturgical Year" to guide them. Manuals of devotion and other formularies should be kept for private prayer.

CHAPTER IV

DEVOTIONS

I

The Use of Devotions

AMONGST a Christian's religious exercises certain external practices, called devotions, usually find a place. Whilst devotion is only another name for piety, devotions are special, sensible, voluntary manifestations in which interior piety loves to express itself, and in which, too, it seeks for helpful assistance.

Each particular devotion comprises three elements: a religious object that deserves reverence and appeals to the senses; a tangible sign to be its symbol, and to bring it to mind by striking the attention; and, lastly, the use of some mortification or prayer, by means of which the soul makes an

effort to get grace from the religious object which it venerates.

Is it a question of devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is so justly popular in our days? The religious object is the Heart itself of our Lord, united to His Divinity, and a source and symbol of the love of Jesus for men; the material sign is a heart encircled with thorns whence flames arise, and which we put up in our houses, or wear on our scapulars; the practice involves the use of invocations or other pious acts, by means of which we try to bring our hearts into harmony with the Heart of Jesus Christ. Or suppose it is a case of devotion to our Lady, as our Lady of the Rosary. The Mother of Jesus is the object of our devotion; the Rosary is the sign that fixes our attachment; the repetition of the *Ave Maria*, with meditation on the mysteries, is the practice that sends us to her. Or is it a question of the Third Order of St. Francis? The virtues of the Patriarch of Assisi are the object of our veneration; the scapular is the sign of the Order to which we belong; the prayers and penances are the personal efforts by

which we try to take our part in his sanctity. And so it is with the rest.

However much devotions may be run down in certain quarters, and however much they may be abused by some who are ill-instructed among the faithful, we hesitate not to say that devotions, used with wisdom and piety, are valuable aids to piety, and even, generally speaking, indispensable supports. In fact, the elements which they comprise are good in themselves, and very proper for the advancement of the religious life.

And to begin with, what do we aim at in the religious object of our worship, unless it be God Himself? We have recourse to the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, to His Divine Heart, to His adorable Face, to His bleeding Wounds, because we know that God is present, and made tangible in His sacred Flesh. Therein it is that the invisible is brought within the range of our looks, and that the Divinity has contracted and enclosed itself, and there it is that Omnipotence has been placed within our reach. In the same way we go to the Saints, and to the Blessed Virgin above all, because we find our

God living and perceptible in them as in Jesus, no doubt to a lesser degree, but in a manner still more merciful and still more adapted to touch the heart. In these objects suggested by devotion, our religion does not go astray, since it finds God in them; but it also discovers in them a most opportune help, since, if God were not thus brought near us, we should have been incapable of finding Him if we had been left to ourselves. Thus these devotions are nothing else than mystic keys, with the help of which we can open the sanctuaries in which it pleases God to deliver His oracles. They are, then, from this point of view, simply excellent.

The sign of itself is powerless. But, from possessing the property of striking our sense-perception, it is a reminder which our soul stands in need of for the awakening of the memory. Here is a heart printed on a piece of cloth; in itself, it is but a remnant which may be crumpled and cast aside; but every time I look at it, it reminds me of my Master's Heart, and of the love He showed in dying for me. Here, again, is a

medal, only a piece of common metal which may be melted in a crucible and lose the representation stamped upon it, but each time I consider it and kiss it, I think of the Blessed Virgin, and of the pledges I have given to her, and of the intercessory power which she puts forth in my behalf with her Divine Son. Signs, therefore, have a value of their own; they are not in any way dangerous, but most profitable, when one only expects from them that which they afford—a salutary admonition to piety.

But we must not confine ourselves to signs; we must go on to make use of the practices that are the really fruitful part of devotions. It is by means of these practices, indeed, that we enter into communion with the objects of our piety. Either they move us to prayer by the formularies to the use of which they bind us, and then they arouse the heart to religious activity, and produce that inward ascent of the soul which is just what piety aspires to. Or else, they call upon us to make sacrifices, and in immolating our sensuousness, our curiosity, our self-

will to God, they already realize the moral progress which it is the end of piety to obtain. When these practices are not carried out mechanically, when they are truly acts of the soul, devotions attain to a high moral value.

There is no need to say any more to show the use of them.

II

Defects to be avoided in Devotions

But devotions are only really useful on condition that they escape the abuses which make them barren.

They are abused, either if they are given an undue preponderance, or else if they overburden the soul or lead to superstition.

We shall say nothing of the strange and scandalous devotions in which rosaries are said, or candles lit, or medals worn for the success of bad or infamous undertakings; these are really aberrations. But without going so far astray as this, some people are found to give such an exaggerated importance to devotions that they come to neglect grave duties belong-

ing to religion or to their state of life. It is not unusual for people who are pious to be partially unfaithful to their household duties, to the demands of decency, and to interest themselves too little in the education of their children, in order to give themselves to practices of devotion which are certainly of less value than such virtues. Others, again, manifest ill-humour or speak roughly because their prayers have been interrupted, even for a good reason. They forget that if they pray to obtain an increase of virtue, they must never cast aside the virtue for the sake of praying.

Who has not noticed some of the faithful in church go straight to the feet of some favourite statue without thinking that the Master, who is present in the Tabernacle, has the first claim upon their adoration?

Those who propagate devotions are specially prone to exaggerate. The one they have to extol is alone worth more than all the rest; it infallibly secures eternal salvation; and without it, there is great danger that we shall never get to the gates of heaven. It is not that the devotions thus put forward are not excellent in

themselves; the mischief is in the mistaken way in which people are enrolled on their behalf. Is it not to be regretted that people join a confraternity only when urged by some erroneous conviction? For there is no one devotion that is obligatory; there is none that takes precedence of all others; it is good for us, if it makes us pray, and if it makes us better.

When the Church approves a devotion, she intends to help souls, and not to burden them. Now, devotions would become an inconvenience and an obstacle to living, if they were multiplied to the point of embarrassment, and if they so tyrannized over the soul as to reduce it to slavery. If they were too numerous, they would consume in prayers and meetings hours which are indispensable for urgent duties; and by prolonged exercises, and by the hasty repetition of interminable formularies, they would wear out and dry up the soul, and they would give the painful sense of being overdriven which produces distaste, and deprives Christian piety of the sweetness which is both its attraction and its

reward. Let no one, then, take upon himself a burden beyond his strength; and, since amongst devotions a choice has to be made, let each one give his preference to those that go best with his own spiritual disposition.

They should no more tyrannize over us than embarrass us; even those we take up leave us at liberty; we may go, according to our inclination, from one to another. To-day it may be the Sacred Heart, to-morrow the Precious Blood; never mind, it is always to Jesus that you go, and it is God whom you find in Jesus. To-day it may be our Lady, to-morrow St. Joseph or some other Saint; never mind, it is always the same God and the same life that you are looking for. And does not the Church herself, by the succession of her feasts, invite us to this liberty of soul?

Above all, take care not to become the slaves of a sign. The sign is only a reminder for religious thought, and a stimulus to prayer and goodness. If it becomes predominant, it will absorb all your devotion, and you will fall into pagan superstitions. When the missionaries take away

amulets and fetishes from savages, they are at much pains to teach them that such things of themselves are impotent, and that they are empty and lying divinities by means of which the devil takes advantage of their credulity, and when they give them in exchange crucifixes and medals, they do not omit to warn them that these things are not new fetishes, and that they will not be infallible talismans of protection, but that they are faithful warnings, and that, by striking the eyes, they will awaken in the soul a fear of sin, thankfulness for the Divine blessings, and the need of prayer, and so on. And yet, to how many Christians are these exterior signs of devotion no more than vain fetishes! Let us not lay ourselves open to just criticisms, let us not cause either our religion or our devotions to be spoken against. We have no need to reject symbols, nor to be ashamed of them, for they are not vain. Let us wear scapulars and medals, let us have statues and crucifixes, let us light candles at the altars of our Lady, but let us not attribute to them virtues that they do not possess. Let us remember that

they do not dispense us from a single effort; their part is to invite us to pray and to work. Let us use these signs, certainly, but as Christians, not as pagans.

III

How to order our Devotions

Although we may enjoy a great amount of liberty in the choice of our devotions, and although any devotion will be good for us if it avoid the mistakes we have pointed out, nevertheless it is important to bring to them a certain order and to give the first place to those that bring us most directly into communion with God.

The devotions which are addressed to our Lord, then, will win our preference. The Holy Eucharist will hold the first place, because it contains Christ Himself living whole and entire under the forms of the sacred species: therein we have His flesh, His heart, His soul, His virtues and His divinity: to receive Him and to visit Him often in this great Sacrament, this is the primary devotion of the true Christian. Next comes the

Gospel, which under the surface of the letter offers us the very word of Jesus : it is a very Catholic devotion always to carry with one, and to read frequently, the sacred text. Of all the symbols that speak to us of Jesus Christ, there is none more traditional nor more suggestive than the Crucifix ; since it is on the Cross that Jesus redeemed us, and on the Cross that He desires to be exhibited before the eyes of all generations of men, we ought to carry the Cross on our breasts, and to hang it up in the most worthy position in our houses and to keep it on our work-tables.

After having given the Holy Eucharist, the Gospel, and the Cross, the honour due to them, we may follow our inclination for this or that part of the Person or the life of our Lord ; His Infancy, His Passion, His Divine Heart, His precious Blood, the five Wounds, the various instruments of His Passion, the Way of the Cross, and so on. An impulse of grace urges souls to-day towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The fervent Christian lets himself be borne in this direction all the more readily because he sees all the treasures of Redemption open

in the Heart of Jesus. But if he sees in this solemn symbol a banner that guarantees victory, he knows that such triumphs will only be granted to the valiant who have won them by their efforts, for the Heart of Christ gives courage to the combatant, but does not dispense him from fighting.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin takes its place by the side of devotion to our Lord; for, after Jesus, there is no one who gives us God Himself more than Mary. This devotion may not come under the head of any particular title; but it may also take the most different shapes, according to the sanctuaries where the Blessed Virgin is honoured, according to the mystery of her life we have in view, and according to the excellence or the intercessory power that we venerate in her. The accessory form is not very important; each of the faithful will select the title which best corresponds with the needs of his own soul. It is of importance that Mary should be honoured for the sake of Jesus, and that in Mary we should look for Jesus, and that, with Mary's help, we should grow like Jesus. Let us take whatever

sign or symbol we may choose: medals, scapulars, pictures, statues, are only symbols, whose business it is to awaken in us memories of the Blessed Virgin and love for her. Frequent prayers, of which the angelical salutation will be the centre, will express our devotion to Mary, and will revive the fire of religion within us. The Rosary is the form which is the most popular; it is made up of the *Ave Maria*, a prayer which can always be said, and which never wearies one.

Beyond these devotions to our Lord and to His holy Mother, we must be very sober. All the Saints certainly deserve special honours; all are powerful intercessors on our behalf, so that, so far as Heaven is concerned, objects for worship are never wanting. But our spirit is soon found wanting; it cannot engage in too many things without overstrain to breaking-point. We must also, because of our weakness, fix a limit to our devotions to the Saints, and become attached to one or two only, whom we may choose as models and patrons; our choice will depend on our inclinations and on the surround-

ings in which we have to live. It will be right, however, to reserve a place for devotion to St. Joseph in the sanctuary of our hearts. He was the guardian of Jesus; the Church has taken him for her protector, and souls tend towards him, during the last few generations, with an ever-increasing movement, and we cannot do better than take our share in it.

CHAPTER V

HOLY MASS

I

What takes Place at the Altar

HOLY MASS, which is the heart of all religion, the fountain from which Christian life flows forth, is also the centre towards which all our pious exercises and many devotions converge. What prayer, in its various forms, develops in us is a holy thirst for the Divine springs which are open to us in the Mass, wherein God Himself comes to satiate us with His grace. Whoever is acquainted with the mysteries of the altar, the beauties and riches of the Mass, has no need to be exhorted to come thereto; he runs thither of himself, borne along by his own heart to this Divine trysting-place.

We are taught by the faith, indeed, that the Mass brings Jesus Christ Himself on to our altars.

With a tractableness that is unspeakable, every time that the priest utters the words of consecration, Jesus descends living into his hands. Beforehand, there was on the altar a little bread and wine; after the consecration, there is neither bread nor wine; under the appearances that remain, we adore the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of Jesus, really present in their integrity. We need not at all envy either the Crib, or the house in Nazareth, or the pious visitors of Bethany, or the Cenacle, or the Cross, or Heaven. He who was the treasure of earth during His mortal life, He who is the joy of Angels and the crown of Saints, it is He whom we have under the veils of the mystery, and of this our faith admits of no doubt. The sacred linen is His swaddling-clothes, the priest's hands are His cradle, the faithful, rich or poor, are those who adore Him.

But the Church teaches us the meaning of this transcendent presence. Jesus is there as Victim; the Mass is a Sacrifice. The immolation of Jesus on the altar is not bloody, because the glorified state of the

Body of Christ will not allow of the shedding of His blood; but the priestly consecration, by the very virtue of the words that tend to separate the Body and Blood, has the full efficacy of a sacrifice. It is the very sacrifice of Calvary that is renewed and rendered present on the altar; the Victim is the same, and He shows God the Father the same gaping wounds, addresses to him the same prayer, extends the same protecting arms over the world, and stretches out the same supplicating hands towards men.

Thus, then, is the whole drama of the Redemption reproduced before our eyes in each Mass. At the foot of the altar, in the name of mankind, the priest confesses all his sins and begs for pardon. Then, up to the time of the Gospel, he revives in his own heart all the desires of the Patriarchs and Prophets for the Messias who was to redeem Israel. He listens to His voice in the reading of the Gospel. He is present at the offering which He makes of His person and His life. He calls upon all the choirs of Angels to come together round the Victim who is

about to immolate Himself. Lastly, by the consecration, all Calvary becomes present on the altar, and Jesus suffers, prays and dies for sinners. As the Sacrifice of Calvary is the culminating point in the history of the world, so is the consecration the central point of the Mass. When the immolation is completed, the people come to purify their souls in the blood poured out, to draw with both hands from the store of prayers and merits, and to participate by communion in the life given to the world by this Victim's flesh. Thus it is that in a short space of time, sometimes amidst the grandeur of our ceremonies, and sometimes in the silence of some dim oratory, the great work of the redemption of men is renewed. Happy is he who then is found on this Calvary at the foot of the Cross! No doubt, even in the most humble of Masses, the Blood of the chalice has such power that its influence extends to the whole of mankind; but also, without doubt, this treasure belongs above all to those who have come to obtain the advantage of it, and whose hands may draw from it persistently.

Draw near, then, O Christian, to this dear Victim. The Roman soldiers, the deicide Jews, have left Calvary; approach without fear, for the Redeemer rejects none who come to Him. Before the Cross thou wilt find Mary standing, the Magdalene prostrate, the women in tears, the well-beloved disciple in anguish, the Apostles returning like fearful ghosts, the dead arising from their tombs to fill the train of the Just One, their Deliverer, the Angels flocking to contemplate Him who has just opened the gate of heaven for them; and then, the daily growing multitude of holy souls, martyrs, virgins, priests, workmen, poor men and even kings, who come to wash their garments in the Blood of the Lamb, and to drink at the pure springs which renew or revive life. Have confidence, O Christian, and with the thirsty crowd set thy lips to the wounds of the heavenly Crucified One, satiate thy heart with the adoration and prayer which He offers to God the Father, and with the graces of light and strength wherewith He sustains needy souls.

II

On attending Mass

If such be the value of a Mass, if it be the most noble act that is done on earth, if it be *par excellence* the praise of God and the treasure of mankind, what eagerness should not Christians feel for the adorable Sacrifice of the altar? If they forsake it, must it not be because they are not aware of its value? Further, it is impossible to be too zealous in giving them instruction as to the value and the benefits of a Mass.

Those who know what Mass means are desirous of hearing it. They are grieved if they are deprived of it, and if illness or business keeps them away from church. If their occupations allow them any spare time, they like to go to Mass every day, even making an effort to rise early not to lose its blessings. Pious people, the duties of whose state of life leave them but little time, hold daily Mass to be the most important of their religious acts; they rightly consider that Mass must be preferred to any other devotional exercise, and that it

must be continued when there is no time for other exercises. Daily Mass is the soul of piety. Anyone who is religious will therefore never omit it without regret, and will always make up for it by devoting an equal amount of time to contemplation of the Sacrifice of Calvary.

Holy Mass, nevertheless, however rich it may be in heavenly graces, is only of value to souls in proportion as they know how to gain from it God's gifts. The Divine springs are there, open and overflowing ; but still one must wish to quench one's thirst at them. A passive attendance at Mass would be sterile ; in this exercise, as in all others, only activity of soul can bear fruit. In order to awaken and to maintain this interior activity, a method is required. But what method ?

Those who cannot keep up their attention without some external aid should always make use of a book ; and those who are more self-sufficing in the power of inward prayer should also use a book from time to time to renew their supply of thought and feeling. In the case of both, the book must have to do with the

Sacrifice of the Mass; any other book would distract the mind and heart from what takes place at the altar. On Sunday it will always be the official Mass-book of the diocese; for, on solemn feasts, the prayers of the faithful should follow the prayer of the priest, and use the same words as far as possible. On weekdays, principally in Masses at which Communion is received, it is a good thing to use those prayers, in our devotional manual, that have been written for attendance at Mass, or else some chapter from the Fourth Book of "The Imitation of Christ." For then, we only look for something in our book which is capable of fastening our attention on the very subject-matter of the Mass, and of stirring up our souls to an impulse of prayer.

Whether it be aroused within us by books, or whether it spring up spontaneously in our hearts, prayer is the form that our inward activity should take during Holy Mass. But this prayer will find expression in various ways according to the degree of education and the actual dispositions of those who pray.

The most simple of the faithful

will join at least in the prayers of the priest, and will say, for instance: "Lord, I scarcely know what my needs are, and I do not know how to tell Thee of them; but this priest at the altar is praying in my name and for me; hearken unto him. All that he is saying to Thee, I say unto Thee; all that he is asking from Thee, I ask too; all that he is promising Thee, I too promise. Accept his prayer as if it were mine, and may the prayer avail for my own soul, for my dear departed ones, and for the whole Church." When these thoughts and feelings are even vaguely present in a Christian's heart, all that he does, even his attitude, becomes a prayer.

Those Christians whose faith has a clearer outlook will unite with the prayer of Jesus living in the priest and under the sacred species, and they will say something like this: "I offer Thee, O my God, the prayer of my Saviour Jesus, the prayer in which He spent the nights of His life on earth, the living prayer with which He intercedes on our behalf in heaven, the prayer that breaks forth in a powerful cry of supplica-

tion in this transcendent Sacrifice of the Mass. Accept this prayer instead of mine. I know not what of honour Thou deservest, nor what are my own needs in respect of grace, nor what expressions I ought to use in speaking to Thee; but Jesus can do all; I offer Thee His adoration and thanksgiving and supplication. If I deserve not that Thou shouldest hear my words, at least Thou wilt not reject those of Jesus."

We shall penetrate still further into the intentions of the Sacrifice, if we offer God our Lord as an expiatory Victim. In such a spirit, we may say to Him, as we follow the different parts of the Mass: "If Thou markest our iniquities, O God, we shall not dare to affront Thee by coming into Thy presence. But, in the name of the Saviour whom Thou hast given us, turn away Thine eyes from our sins. He whom sinful humanity has called for by its ardent desires, He whom the prophets have announced with a tremor of hope and joy, He who has brought into the world the good news of salvation, He who has shed His Blood to wash away our sins, Jesus is there upon

the altar, a willing Victim, setting before Thee the wounds of His scourging, of His crowning with thorns, and of His crucifixion. Hearken to the pleading of His wounds; they cry for mercy on our behalf. O God, Thou demandest reparation. Here it is; it is infinite, like the Majesty that we have outraged. Let the just anger in Thine eyes be appeased as they dwell upon the sweet and dear face of Thy Son Jesus Christ!"

And, lastly, the more interior souls will offer themselves to God with Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. They will then say to Jesus: "Though I am but a sinner, O my Saviour Jesus, grant that I may unite with Thee in dying with Thee, and in redeeming men with Thee. Thou hadst but one life to immolate to Thy Father; I offer Thee another, mine own, in order to take part in the same sacrifice. Lay me on the altar along with the bread and the wine. Pronounce over me, O High Priest, the words that shall transform me into Thee. Once changed into Thee, and enriched with Thy merits, like Thee I will be a victim; I will

give Thee my body, my mind, my senses and my will, in order that all that I am may enable Thee to extend and to complete the work of Thy Divine Passion. Thy flesh did not suffice to satisfy Thy desire for suffering; lo, here is mine; make use of it to satiate Thyself in me with sorrow and expiation. And as it would be vain to say this, if I were not ready to do it, I accept all the sufferings, and contradictions, and humiliations that may befall me to-day; grant that after attending this Mass, in which Thou art the Victim, I may make of this day now beginning an unceasing Mass in which I myself shall be the whole burnt-offering."

These thoughts, and many others of a similar Christian tenour, will keep the soul on the alert, and enable the believer to make Holy Mass an ever-fruitful and consoling exercise.

CHAPTER VI

HOLY COMMUNION

I

What is received at the Holy Table

HOLY COMMUNION is not an exercise, as distinct from Holy Mass. And it is only by an act of toleration that the Church permits one to communicate apart from the Holy Sacrifice. While the flesh of the Divine Victim is still on the altar, and after it has been offered to God as the living expression of religious duty, the priest distributes it. He is bound to feed upon it himself; then he gives it to the faithful. In the primitive Church, all came to take part in the feast of the Lamb. In our days, all who attend do not draw near, but all are invited, and many are led on by holy desires to

accept the invitation. Holy Communion, then, is the natural consummation of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Therein the flesh of Christ is received as food; the priest and the faithful partake of it as the bread of the soul. "My flesh," says Jesus, "is meat indeed; and my blood is drink indeed." "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." "This is the bread that came down from heaven. He that eateth this bread shall live for ever."* These words of the Gospel show us clearly what to look for in the Holy Eucharist. We communicate, neither to experience overpowering sweetness nor exactly to receive the Divine visit, but in order to eat the bread that giveth life. This heavenly bread repairs loss, renews strength, fits us for work and arms us for the fight. Certainly, it gives joy and fills us with the ineffable presence of God; but above all it is bread, and the

* John vi. 50-59.

place where we partake of it is called the Holy Table.

Thus understood, Holy Communion is manifested to us in its necessity and in its effects. He who does not eat this bread will die sooner or later, and the life of God will perish in his soul. But before dying out for want of nourishment, this life, after becoming weakened and powerless to defend itself, will fall under the blows of enemies who harass it unceasingly within and without. Hence the necessity for this Divine manna; the Christian has no right to go without it. Besides, what does he not gain in disposition and moral character from this Divine food? In proportion as he assimilates the substance of it, he becomes more vigorous, more capable of resistance, more ardent, more active and more persevering; for strength and animation will have energized his whole being.

Compare souls who communicate with those who do not, follow both classes in the practice of the moral life. We may be quite sure that observation will not give the lie to the promises made by Christ to those who receive the heavenly Bread.

Look where to find those who control the baser passions, those, at any rate, who never admit defeat by them, those who make daily efforts to attain to a better life, those who give up their time and their lives to the exercise of charity, those who are most scrupulous in the discharge of the duties of their state of life, and those whose conscience is a mentor always heeded because its voice is taken for the very voice of God. Where will you find them, unless it is principally among those who communicate, and whose hearts are strengthened and uplifted by the living Bread? The experience of nineteen centuries has borne witness to the words of Jesus; he who refuses this Bread rejects life, and he who is careless about taking it has only a drooping life, and he who feeds upon it with a holy hunger has a happy and overflowing life.

The mere character of Holy Communion shows plainly enough how frequent it ought to be. If it were to us nothing else than the visit of the King of kings, we might be kept away from it through fear of bringing some hurt to this supreme Majesty,

or from the irksomeness of having to get ready for a royal reception. But it is a question of giving bread to the famished, of supplying nourishment to those who are exhausted with toil, and who need to be equipped for a fresh task. When bread is set before him, the workman has no need to be pressed; he takes it as soon as he is hungry.

And this is the rule by which to measure the frequency of your communions. You will consult your needs, both those of your moral life and those of your heart; and next you will consult your desires, not those which might spring from a certain vanity, but those that take their rise in a true love of Christ. Then you will display to your spiritual director the state of your soul, and you will follow the directions he gives you. If he finds you have a real hunger for the Holy Eucharist, and if he observes that this Bread nourishes you and develops your moral life, he will not hesitate to throw the gates of the Divine banquet wide open for you. Even the direction to communicate every day need not make you puffed up or

timid; for you ought not to regard it as a favour or a burden, but merely as a necessity, to eat day by day the Bread of Life and to benefit by it.

II

Preparation for Holy Communion

From the fact that Holy Communion gives us a seat at a father's table, it does not follow that we may draw near it without respect. You will show the due measure of your respect and love in the preparation that you bestow upon them.

This preparation comprises a habitual state of purity of soul, efforts of will to merit the gift of God, and an ardent appeal of the heart at the moment of reception.

The Holy Eucharist, as you know, is only given to the living, because it is a Bread of Life; it has nothing to do with the dead. If there were some grave sin on your conscience, do not go to the Holy Table; thus to take the Flesh and Blood of Christ would be, in the words of St. Paul, to eat and drink "judgement"* to

* 1 Cor. xi. 29.

yourself—that is to say, it would be to your condemnation. Let this sin, which was that of Judas, never be yours; it were better to undergo any sort of shame than to incur the curse of such a sacrilege. You must, then, be in a state of grace when you communicate. But for the pious soul this will be too little. Not only will mortal sin not reign in you; venial sin itself will not hold any power over you. Doubtless you cannot avoid all faults, so great is our fragility; but at least you will not love any of them, and you will deplore them all with sincerity of heart. But as soon as you can say to God: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,"* and as soon as you can say it with truth, be at peace, you will not be the slave of any sin, and you will have that inner purity that finds favour in the eyes of God.

Thus clad in the wedding garment, you can often go into the Lamb's feast. Take care, however, to prepare for the Bridegroom gifts to delight Him, I mean a sheaf of merits gathered by your endeavours. Or, better still, let us borrow from

* John xxi. 17.

the Table and the Bread the lesson taught by their symbols. Remember what the Apostle wrote: "If any man will not work, neither let him eat."* The Bread, then, is there for him who has earned it. Further, the idler does not hunger for sustenance; the worker alone, in spending his life, gives birth to the keen desire for its renewal. Would you, too, earn your eucharistic Bread? Work. Would you awaken in your soul an appetite for the heavenly Bread? Again, work. Now, the work of the soul is goodness; therefore strive to-day to overcome temptation, to triumph over curiosity and ill-humour, to spread around you the joy that shines through kindness, to fulfil with regularity and perfection all the duties of your state of life, and then, to-morrow, you will go without fear to the Holy Table, because you will have earned your Bread; you will even feel a hearty appetite for the heavenly manna, because you will have trained your life beforehand.

When the hour for Communion has come, remain in the greatest

* 2 Thess. iii. 10.

tranquillity and be full of simple confidence, as befits a son in his Father's house. Follow the Mass with devotion, uniting in the acts and prayers of the priest, and think that what the Church has set down to prepare the priest to communicate is also an excellent preparation for the believer. Nevertheless, you may have recourse to the religious forms contained in books of devotion, but on condition that you do not look for sensuous satisfaction in them; for God does not give Himself to your senses, but to your faith. And this is exactly why you will begin with an act of faith in the real presence of Jesus living under the appearance of bread, in order to feed you with His Flesh. And then, looking through your conscience, you will pray God to blot out the last traces of sin; and you will use the humble words of the centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: but only say the word, and thy servant shall be healed."* You will then call for Him with all the ardour of your desires, and you will give yourself

* Matt. viii. 8.

up to all the inspirations of Divine love. Your prayer, repeated a hundred times, will be: "Come, Lord Jesus, come; be the Bread of my life, the Peace of my senses, the Light of my mind, the Strength of my will, the Joy of my heart, be all mine."

III

Thanksgiving after Holy Communion

You will not be one of the ungrateful poor who, as soon as they have received bread, turn away from their benefactor, and, instead of blessing the hand that has loaded them with bounty, rather murmur at having received too little. To be thankful, you need only follow the good impulse of your heart; but your faith, too, will incline you to be thankful, by reminding you of the value and absolute gratuitousness of the gift which has been committed to you. Your thanksgiving will be divided into two parts: you will begin it before leaving the church, and you will follow it up throughout the day.

Unless urgent business calls you

to go out, do not leave the church until you have spent a quarter of an hour in giving thanks to God. These few minutes are, indeed, all too short for pouring out the feelings of your heart; but if they are faithfully observed, they will be a pledge of your gratitude. During these precious moments, the happiest of your life, do not labour to extract any extraordinary thoughts from your mind; but rather open your heart and let it take its course. If it needs arousing by some form of prayer, take a book to stir it up; but as soon as the flame is kindled, let it alone. It will adore, by means of an act of faith, the God who has given Himself to it; it will thank Him for coming thus, under the form of bread, to restore its life; it will set forth before Him the needs of the soul, the needs of those whom it loves, and the needs, above all, of those whom it mourns; it will offer Him all that it is and all that it has: its failings that He may mend them, its weaknesses that He may supply them, and its powers that He may use them to the glory of His Father; and it will conclude with a steadfast

promise of becoming better, by checking such and such faults, or by practising such and such acts of virtue.

However recollected and generous a soul may be during this quarter of an hour, it has not done enough to discharge its debt; and it carries away with it, when it leaves, the memory of the benefits received, and it proposes to prolong its thanksgiving during the hours and days following. Reflecting that it is living bread that was consumed at the altar, the soul concludes that it must assimilate this food and show itself stronger in moral action. And as it has noticed that the Holy Eucharist is often spoken against and despised by the world, because certain pious people have exhibited to the world lives that the Holy Eucharist has not made better, it wishes its conduct to be a public reparation for the hurt done to God, and a living preaching of the excellence hidden in the Holy Eucharist.

And this is why such an one, returning to his family or his business, gives open testimony by his life that One who is great and holy dwells

and acts within him. This High Being who, by Holy Communion, indwells him, is revealed by his calmness in action, his gentleness in word, his amiability of manner, his strength in enterprise, his unselfishness in service, and by his strict fidelity to all the duties of his state of life. If a man is thus to rise above himself, if the steadfastness of his virtue is to prove that a superhuman power possesses him, he must give himself up uninterruptedly to keeping himself in dependence upon Him whom he has received in Holy Communion, conforming to His thoughts and submitting to His influence, and, in a word, borrowing His life. And this constant endeavour becomes his living act of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER VII

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

I

The Benefits of the Sacrament of Penance

THE Holy Eucharist is the most divine of the Sacraments, Penance is the most human. God is all in the Holy Eucharist; in it He gives Himself by means of the Flesh and Blood of Christ; man has only to lay himself open and to lend himself to His mighty influence. In Penance, man plays a greater part; it is by the united activity of the confessor and the penitent that God works the pardon of sins. While grace comes complete in itself from the Eucharist, man collaborates with God to obtain it in Penance. God alone, indeed, is the Author of forgiveness; but He does not grant it without the moral effort of man.

See, indeed, how the sinner works his conscience. He interrogates it by self-examination, and pushes his inquiry into the most secret depths. Then he makes a faithful avowal of the faults of which he feels that he is guilty, humiliating himself in his own heart not less than in the presence of his confessor. He disturbs himself with repentance and bows his head beneath the hand that gives him absolution. Lastly, he binds himself to an expiation whereby he mingles the drops of his own blood with the flow of the redeeming blood of Christ. The Sacrament will not take place nor produce its effect, unless the sinner does all this work.

The work is all the more laborious because it must move the soul to its very depths. Superficial feelings would not touch the heart of God, because they would not break the heart of man; they are only effectual on condition that they are sincere, and go down to the roots of our inmost being. Thus, the most hidden and shameful faults must be disclosed, and the self-accusation must be entire and without dissimulation; regret must be universal so far as the

faculties of the soul are concerned, as well as regards the sins that are deplored, and the satisfaction made cannot be reduced to an empty formality, it must really strike and correct the sinner. Sincerity, then, stirs the whole man; it turns his being upside-down like a field that is dug up.

And for fear lest the sinner be faint-hearted or impotent in thus mending his own heart, he is officially helped in the work by his confessor. Even a priest cannot administer the Sacrament of Penance to himself. Whoever wishes for the pardon of his faults can only obtain it, in ordinary circumstances, with the help of God's minister. For this reason the sacrament has its human side. This requirement, far from being a burden, is a consolation. It is therefore in mercy, and not from hardness, that Christ has ordained that, in the Sacrament of Penance, the Christian shall be bound to address himself to a judge, a pastor, and a physician, for his confessor is all of these to him. As soon as some one is to hear you, what care do you not apply to the examination of your

conscience! What definiteness do you not use in your acknowledgments! As soon as you have before you a man who exhorts you in God's name, what a powerful action will it not have over your faith, your mind and your will! As soon as you have to do with a man who visibly lifts up his hand with the Divine power of giving you absolution, what a deep feeling will you not experience of peace recovered and innocence restored! Take away the man, take away this living representative of God, what vagueness follows in self-examination, what slackness in searching out your faults! What uncertainty in the forgiveness! How superficial the repentance! You cannot then thank God enough for making confession the necessary means of your moral restoration.

When the sacrament has been once conferred, the priest has not yet completed his mission so far as you are concerned. When he has purified your soul and blotted out your sins by absolution, he opens to you, by means of direction, the way to a better life. He has repaired the past; he is to prepare for the future. By

the enlightenment he gives you, both as to the ideal to follow and as to the spiritual weaknesses that threaten to bar your progress, he will tell you what faults to avoid, what virtues to acquire, and what efforts you must make inwardly and personally in order to increase within you the Christian life. By the impulses that he will impart to your will, he will set it to pray or to work, he will sustain it against inconstancy and prevent it from all kinds of discouragement.

This sacred tribunal is, then, in all respects beneficent. The guilty, if he is sincere, leaves it in peace, and encouraged. He has found peace, because he has unburdened his heart of the weight of his sins, and because he feels, by faith, the grace of forgiveness descend upon his soul; and at the same time as God was breaking off his chains of sin and setting him free, the compassionate hand of a father was dressing his wounds and relieving his sufferings. Nothing in our life gives a happier sense of peace than this testimony of a conscience that has regained its self-esteem and the friendship of God. And to this

tranquillity strength is added. For, by the grace of the sacrament and with the vigorous influence of the confessor, the penitent receives new light as to his duties, more fervent desires in his heart, fresh energy of soul, and he returns to his moral endeavour with more resolution and courage, and with a greater capacity for perseverance. His fervency may go off and his will give way again, but what a gain it is to get possession of one's self and to raise one's self once more! Besides, he can again have recourse to the same source of regeneration.

II

The Practice of Confession

A sacrament which is so rich in divine gifts, and in which man's work plays so large a part, must not be treated lightly, but requires the most serious attention in practice. As we are only speaking now to Christians who use confession, we shall only give such counsels as are calculated to enable them to get some real advantage from it.

If you are free to choose your confessor, you will preferably select one whose piety guarantees you of coming into close touch with God, whose knowledge will enable him to mark out for you most clearly the path of perfection, and whose firmness will secure the most constant support for your weakness. He must not be antipathetic to you, for fear lest your soul should feel any want of freedom in opening itself to him; but neither must he be so familiar with you that your respect is thereby in any degree diminished, or that he may be to you rather a man than a minister of God. No confession should be a link to bind you to the personality of your confessor; and from time to time it will be a good thing for you to receive the counsels of another; and you may even change him altogether, not, indeed, out of lightness or from fear of too powerful a direction, but for good reasons, such as feeling either too embarrassed or too much at ease with him.

A pious person who is sound in soul—that is to say, who is neither tormented with scruples nor a victim of grave failings—will usually go to

confession once a fortnight; this seems to be the most suitable period, either so that the influence of the sacrament may not die out, or else to avoid the creeping in of a sense of routine. But no rule is obligatory; and in this matter all depends upon the personal needs of each soul.

The time taken by a confession is usually from five to ten minutes. Just as haste is but little fitting for the sacrament, so are habitual prolongations of the time baneful to it. Confession is a definite work to be gone through; take enough time to make each act in it with the gravity that becomes it; but take care that such a grave step does not degenerate into a conversation that might be dangerous. The scrupulous, too, must be led to say what has to be said briskly, for lengthened talk can only increase their malady.

A well-conducted self-examination will clearly determine the matter of self-accusation. Let it be quick enough not to be painful nor weakening to the conscience. If grave sins have to be dealt with, a pious person perceives them at once, as it were, on

the surface of the soul, so deeply has the trace of them been embedded in it. But, thanks be to God, mortal sins will be rare, so that, in such an one, as a rule, venial faults alone will be in question. But, if it be remembered that venial sins are all pardoned as soon as they are regretted, one infers that it is far less important to discover them than to excite in oneself contrition that shall exclude none of them. Therefore, instead of pulverizing one's conscience and passing it through the crucible of a minute and tiring examination, the penitent should set himself to seize upon his most characteristic, voluntary, and spiritually hurtful faults, which it is urgent that he should indicate to his confessor in order the better to fight against them. As soon as these few sins have been well noted, the time of preparation should be used to excite in oneself feelings of contrition ; and as contrition is primarily a gift of God, and then an act of man's heart, it arises and grows in the soul under the twofold influence of prayer that asks for it, and of the effort to express it.

The Sacrament of Penance

The accusation of one's sins should be frank and simple; frank, that is to say, without any dissembling, dissimulating nothing that might enlighten the confessor, giving as certain what is certain and as doubtful what is doubtful; simple, that is to say, neither complicated with stories and circumstances that are of no concern to the confessor, nor clouded with repetitions or reservations which show that the penitent is not very sure of his ground. Confine yourself to a small number of sins which are clearly distinguished, and real ones, and sincerely regretted. Long lists of faults, set forth in the same hackneyed terms, and without any face-to-face reality in them, and without any contrition definitely brought to bear upon some one sin, are the bane of confessions.

When once the act of contrition has been piously said under the absolution of the confessor, there still remains something to be done to give the sacrament all its completeness; there is satisfaction. The penances to-day given by the priest are indeed very light, whether they be prayers

or mortifications; but they have the same meaning as the long and painful penances assigned to penitents by the early Church, whether it be for the expiation of sins committed, or to protect the penitent from fresh falls. In this spirit, and after having done what the priest bids, pious persons will prescribe prayers and acts of sacrifice for themselves, in order to punish themselves for the past, and to make them stronger for the future. Thus the Sacrament of Penance is fulfilled by the practice of acts of virtue.

III

Spiritual Direction

To the Sacrament of Penance is added, as a kind of supplement, the practice of spiritual direction. It is, indeed, the confessor himself who is usually the spiritual director; and direction, if it is to be usefully carried out, presupposes as full an opening of the heart as confession itself. Cases may occur in which the spiritual director in whom we confide is not available, and we shall there-

fore receive direction from one who is not our confessor.

A pious person rarely makes progress in perfection if he does not make use of direction. It is not that he will surrender his liberty and management of himself into the hands of his director, because such an abdication would be the abandonment of all progress. On the contrary, he will only make use of his director to enlarge the scope of his personality, and in order to get a better hold upon himself.

He has recourse to a director for our ends in chief.

He looks to him first for the learning of the teacher ; for, thanks to the enlightenment he gets from it, he can better examine his conscience and discern the spirit with which he is animated, and obtain a clearer and wider view of the road that leads to God ; and he learns from it how to wield his spiritual weapons, develops his interior faculties, and applies them with skill to the acquisition of virtue.

He finds in the director an awakener of the soul, and one who supplies the stimulus it requires, if

it is to be kept from lethargy. Without the impetus supplied by direction, he would soon grow weary with the length of the road, so great is the distance between the clear vision of what is right and the full realization of the best intentions. In the moral life, periodical encouragement is a resource of infinite value.

When circumstances are difficult, or great responsibilities have to be faced, the director becomes the prudent counsellor whose wise advice suggests sound decisions. Then the entire confidence which is placed in his words gives firmness in the midst of embarrassments, and drives away the cruel anguish arising from uncertainty.

Finally, let it be added that he is a father and consoler in sadness and affliction. The hours of suffering are doubly dangerous; the heart's sore wounds give sharp pain, and the strength of the soul melts away in discouragement. Then it is the proper work of the director to pour upon the wounds a sweet balm to relieve their smarting pangs, and to sustain the energy of the will under the violent assaults of trial. Thanks to him,

hope survives in the afflicted soul, and action is again made to spring from the broken heart.

Direction, however, is only blessed by God, and only produces these consoling effects when it conforms to the rules suggested by Christian prudence, whether we consider the director or the directed.

In the director it presumes supernatural enlightenment, knowledge, devotion and discretion. A supernatural spirit keeps in view solely the glory of God and the good of the soul. Knowledge maintains the director in the right paths, and preserves him from eccentricities and novelties. Devotion makes him ready to sacrifice himself for souls, without listening to thoughts of idleness or of self-interest. Lastly, discretion makes him respect the individuality of his penitent as a sacred treasure-house.

They are very indiscreet directors who go too far, and use a sort of violence in penetrating into the lives of those whom they direct, and who harass them with importunate questions or load them with exacting requirements. Let them remember

that, so far as the soul is concerned, they are not warders who have to imprison them in their own caprices, but guides who have to free them from their bonds and to encourage them to walk alone. They are not to such an extent the masters of people's souls as to be able to prevent them from seeking counsel elsewhere. And they ought to use no less circumspection to check any intimacy which might cause their direction to miss the way, and might make it dangerous.

Those who seek guidance should give full confidence to their director, but without abandoning their own individuality.

Their confidence looks to their director for supernatural illumination to enlighten them as to the path of duty, and for strength to walk in it. It implies docility of spirit and heart as to counsels or moral impulses imparted by the representative of God.

But it is important that the personality of the penitent should remain intact. Because a soul seeks direction, it does not become like a senseless ball struck by a tennis-player; but instead of being passive

and of moving mechanically, it has the sense of acting on its own initiative and on its own responsibility, and it walks with a free step and with deliberation in the way of action marked out by the director. It is only on this condition that it can acquire any merit, since then its acts become its own, and it develops its own faculties, since it is its own activity that comes into play. Let there be no fear that the personality of the penitent may offer some hindrance to obedience; on the contrary, obedience gets its dignity and its high moral value from the fact that it puts itself on the side of authority with a deliberate will and with intentional submission. Obedience, moreover, cannot extend to everything; there are a number of acts which must be performed daily on one's own personal initiative. The true moral temper, therefore, is composed of personal initiative based on the spirit of obedience.

CHAPTER VIII

INSTRUCTIONS AND READING

I

Their Necessity

GOD does not exhaust his power of communicating with man in the sacraments. By Penance and by the Holy Eucharist, He pours floods of light into the hearts of Christians; but the way in which they enter into the heart is as mysterious as is their action. His graces reach us by other channels as well; they certainly are less rich, but they are more within the reach of our senses, and their influence is more easily studied: these are instructions and reading. What God wishes to say to us, when we are praying, in order to enlighten our minds and to touch our hearts, this He wills to impart to us by the

spoken or written word. Before we speak to Him in prayer, He wishes us to listen to Him in our reading.

This disposition of Providence is, moreover, in accord with the plan followed by God in all His works.

In the valleys there is no spring which is so abundant as not to run dry, if the heights from which it flows are long without rain; nor is there in the plains any grass, however green, that will not dry up and die, if the ground in which its roots are set is not frequently watered by dew from heaven or by artificial irrigation. To all that lives some outward supply is necessary; and if left to itself, the most vigorous of germs would not fructify.

And thus is it with the things of the spirit, and more particularly with the life of piety. No doubt this life has its origin within; but its activity only develops under the impulse that comes from without. In order that this mystical plant may live and grow, it is indispensable that the heavenly rain should fall upon the heights of the soul and fructify all its faculties. And whilst the sacraments will increase the strength of its inner

vitality, instructions and reading will nourish the mind and the heart with thoughts and feelings that will enrich it from without.

So far is meditation from being able to make up for this that it can itself only be maintained by borrowing from men and books. If, by the written or the spoken word, a powerful thought enters into the soul, immediately all the faculties awaken and begin to act; the mind considers it in its different aspects, the heart uses it to renew its feelings, the imagination gives it a sensible shape, and the whole being hastens to receive from it sustenance and greater vigour. But soon, like a food from which the digestion has extracted all the nourishment, this thought is without any remaining goodness in it, and the word that enshrined it becomes sterile; a new element must be implanted in the soul, or else its activity will begin to slumber, and if the vacuum remains, it slowly wastes away by the very fact of disuse. All lives that are left to themselves inevitably begin to sink And so men of prayer take great care, not only to be recollected, but

also to surround themselves with a rich atmosphere of good thoughts and pious feelings, which will prevent them from falling into aridity. Their experience teaches them that piety withers like a plant in dry ground, as soon as reading and instructions cease to make the beneficent stream of thought and feeling flow through their hearts.

These laws of the interior life are only too well verified by observations which can be made at every step.

You are surprised that, amongst the people, the taste for the practices of religion falls away so quickly after their first communion, and that the faith itself is so soon shaken or uprooted among them. But how can it be otherwise? These folks, as soon as they are twelve years old, never read any religious book and hear no instructions, or else, if they do hear them, for various reasons for which they are not responsible, the instructions have no hold upon them. From a religious point of view, their soul is like a desert where there is neither seed nor water; what is there to wonder at if life perishes, and if it

is so hard to make it afterwards revive in their case?

There often may be seen young folks, who, until they were eighteen years of age, have grown up in piety in zealous boarding-schools. On returning to their families they gradually lose their pious habits, they grow weary of their exercises, and in proportion as they give up praying, moral effort also gets weaker, until it disappears. Do not hasten to blame the convent which has brought them up; while there, they were daily sustained with instructions and reading, and grew like young shoots by the water's edge. And if they are now wasting away, is it not because nothing comes to nourish their first vigour? Engulfed in the whirlpool of worldly excitement, deprived of books and exhortations to piety, increasingly engrossed with worldly thoughts and preoccupations, they undergo a fatal decadence, unless they struggle against their new surroundings by putting themselves under their former influences with the greatest fidelity.

In the same way, look for no other cause of that spiritual languor, soon

followed by dryness and distaste, which besets young priests a few months after leaving the seminary. Their piety was wanting neither in sincerity nor in soundness so long as it had proper nourishment to sustain it. And if it now begins to wither and is in danger of dying, it is because it no longer receives, either from books or men, the stimulus required for its vitality. It is usual to say to such priests: "Be regular in your daily prayer, and you will be saved." But we should resolutely add: "You will only continue your prayer and make it bear fruit if you make a practice of spiritual reading."

It is a sovereign remedy. For edifying conversation and encouraging reading, like newly-rising sap, stir and make souls young again, and clothe them with verdure for a rich and fruitful harvest.

History is full of these revivals of the soul wrought by the powerful action of words of piety. Of all words spoken on earth none were ever more luminous nor more inspiring than those of Jesus, so that His enemies called him "the seducer," *

* Matt. xxvii. 63.

and that crowds, enchanted by them, followed Him into the wilderness and cried: "Never did man speak like this man." * The happy disciples of Emmaus, after talking with Him by the way, could well say: "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way?" † And He communicated this persuasive power to His Apostles. St. Paul moved King Agrippa. "In a little," said the King, "thou persuadest me to become a Christian." ‡ Even in our own days, the burning and supernatural speech of our missionaries exerts an influence over the multitude that renews their faith and moral generosity. Who of us has not felt his heart touched by an utterance full of the spirit of God? Whether it be spoken from the pulpit, or whether it be said in private, it has the power, if it be divinely inspired, of reviving the mind and heart.

Books, too, though to a lesser extent, have the power of awakening souls, and of giving richness to their life. From time immemorial, reading has been the sustenance of the

* John vii. 46. † Luke xxiv. 31.
‡ Acts xxvi. 28.

religious, and has strengthened their Christian temper. It was for believers, who had never heard Christ and yet desired to feed upon His words day by day, that the Gospels were written ; since then, how many Saints in solitude, how many apostolic men, how many persons engaged in worldly affairs, have maintained themselves and made progress in the Christian spirit by familiarity with these divine pages! The same breath of Jesus Christ inspires the lives of the Saints as well as their spiritual writings. The books which narrate their history, or which contain their writings, are inexhaustible springs from which souls athirst for progress may drink deep of divine gifts. It is in reading that communities find holy thoughts, which enable souls to practise recollection and safeguard silence, as well as those feelings of compunction that keep sin at a distance and give a moral impetus. If communities were deprived of books and instructions, immediately their gravity would be dissipated and disorder would come in, and the rule of God would be cast aside. In the same way, if you

leave a pious person without his daily spiritual reading, you will soon have to deplore a falling off in his religious state. Therefore, let this practice be considered indispensable by anyone who wishes to live a holy life.

II

How to make use of Men and Books

If you are really convinced that it is necessary to receive the Word of God from without, in order that your interior life may be sustained and grow, you will seek for it wherever God offers it to you, whether on human lips or in the pages of books.

It is most alive when it springs forth, warm and communicative, from the hearts of pious men who draw their feelings and thoughts from God. But there are only a few who so live upon the love of God that their entire individuality is a sermon. Yet they are to be found. If God grants you the singular grace of coming across such as these, you will recognize

them by this sign, that their words will seem to you as some warm breath of springtime, which brings forth in you the buds of holy desires. Allow yourself, then, to be influenced by their beneficent action. If they preach, go to hear their instructions; if they are spiritual directors, take their advice. Draw near every source that emits rays of life. Often, alas, you will hear things said which are not at all above the ordinary; but listen to them nevertheless, because of the good seed that you may perhaps gather from them; instead of criticizing them, it is better for you to seek to obtain from them such profit as you can.

Those who have the gift of awakening souls are so few and far between, and usually so difficult to get at, that you will probably be reduced to listening to the voice of God chiefly in books. If books are colder, they have the advantage of being inseparable companions; they accompany us into the deepest solitudes; and they reach us, filled as they are with the spirit of the eminent men who have written them under the inspiration of God. Hold them as your

dearest friends, and know that it is God Himself who speaks to you from their pages.

You will not spend a single day without reading something; however busy you may be, do not allow yourself to go without it any more than you would go without your meals or your prayers. Your soul needs this sustenance; it will not be able to pray unless the word of God concentrates and enlightens and fires it. Outside of communities there are but few who can give half an hour to this daily reading. If you only set apart a quarter of an hour, or even less, you would not fail to draw much profit from this meeting with God and listening to His voice.

You will preferably choose the evening for your reading, when your business is over and you can enjoy silence and repose. The more you feel moral lassitude and disillusionment, the more empty your heart is of human companionship, the more need you will have of taking refuge in God and of experiencing His fatherly kindness. Then it is sweet to lay oneself open to His pure illumination, and to renew one's life

in His wholesome atmosphere! While you are asleep, the seeds implanted in your soul in the evening will germinate freely. Working inwardly and fruitfully, though all unconsciously, thoughts of wisdom and instincts of goodness will gain the upper hand, and next morning you will resume the labour of life with a heart full of generosity and kindliness.

And in order that your reading may be thus beneficial, you will choose books that are less intellectual than spiritual, and that appeal rather to your soul than to your mind. Works of the intellect only may be learned, but they are lacking in life; on the other hand, books that come entirely from the soul are certainly not wanting in what can illumine the intelligence, but they possess the incomparable gift of awakening or of arousing life by kindling the heart. Let us add that they should be written under the influence of religion; besides, it is on this condition that they act upon the very depths of the soul.

Amongst all books, you will particularly be devoted to the Holy Scrip-

tures and especially to the Gospels. There you have the true word of God, and it comes to you by the Apostles and the Prophets, or from Jesus Christ Himself. Let the Gospel hold the first place in your library. I should like to see no day pass in which you did not draw near in spirit to this glowing centre of your Master's words.

After the Sacred Writings, there is nothing more divine or more wholesome than "The Imitation of Christ." This book shows no trace of any time or nation, nor of any particular individual, just as it gives no signature. It is the sublime and simple conversation of the good God with suffering humanity. Until the end of the ages, in all climates and under all forms of civilization, the human soul, whether educated or not, will feel that these pages contain the cry of its agonized heart and the pitiful reply of its God. Make use, then, of "The Imitation"; in reading it, you will ever raise the level of your soul from a religious point of view.

Have also by you the "Introduction to a Devout Life" of St. Francis of Sales. Piety has never been taught

with more grace, rightness, and good sense. This book, too, is one of those that never grow old, because it answers to the deepest aspirations of the human heart. Add to this the "Spiritual Combat," of which St. Francis of Sales himself made so much, and you will have the four books familiarity with which is indispensable to everyone who aims at piety.

The books afterwards to be made use of may be divided into three classes: the lives of the Saints, which show us sanctity in practice, and thus persuade us that it is within the reach of human strength and lead us on by example to become better; treatises on spiritual subjects, which were so numerous and so much read in the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries, but are so much fewer and weaker in our own days, and of which the best appreciated are those of Rodriguez, Faber and Gay, and lastly, books of devotion, such as the various booklets of St. Alphonsus, which give instruction and prayers for various exercises.

Whatever books you read, do not store them in your memory or make

use of them as if it were for some learned work. Inhale and live in the pure warm air of their pages. Have recourse to them, not to obtain knowledge, but to get from them a more intense and a higher life. Keep your soul under their influence, like some newly-turned ground beneath the hand of the sower or the rain of heaven. Without making any effort, and with nothing but your inward silence, you will become enriched and made fruitful. You will leave off different from what you were when you began. This change of condition is the true result to aim at in the religious use of books or men.

CHAPTER IX

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

I

Its Place in the Life of Piety

THE immediate aim of piety is to put man in close intimacy with God; for, by faith, it brings forth God from the shadows of mystery and makes Him perceptible to the heart; by love, it embraces Him and takes possession of Him; and by prayer, it becomes attached to Him and drinks in His life, like the babe at its mother's breast.

This intimacy produces joy and peace, together with a feeling of confidence and strength.

But enjoyment, however pure it may be, is not the ultimate end of piety. God gives Himself under the form of life, not to efface our own personal life, but to raise it up and to

make it better. He sanctifies us, less by making sanctuaries of us in which there is the consecration of His presence than by inspiring us with worthier feelings and nobler actions. It were, then, to misunderstand the divine purpose, and to paralyze the action of the Holy Spirit, if in our piety we did not follow after an increase of moral life by means of virtue.

He who only seeks enjoyment in his piety is false to God's gifts. God only gives Himself and imparts happiness to us here below, in order to help us to live better.

And hence, piety enjoins those actions which are presupposed by a good moral life.

These acts may be reduced to two in chief: the taking knowledge of oneself and the conquest of oneself.

The morally good man is he who has made the conquest of himself in the struggle with the thousand tyrants who contend with him for the rule over his being. He attains a higher moral elevation in proportion as he escapes outside influences and inner caprice and as, being his own

master, he gives himself all the more whole-heartedly to duty.

But, in order to be one's own master, the first condition is to remain at home within one's own heart. Nothing arouses a man more to undertake the government of his life than a frequent examination of conscience, a strict watch upon the movements of his mind and heart, and a faithful taking stock of the value of his acts and of their bearing.

This is exactly the end of the examination of conscience; this is what marks its place and signalizes its high importance in the life of piety. You are not really pious unless you obtain from God the gift of a better life; and you will only live a good life on condition of dwelling within yourself and attending to the inner motions of the soul; but you will only be at home in your own heart, if your examination of conscience frequently causes you to come back to it.

Every tradesman who has the prosperity of his house at heart remains faithfully at his place of business; he receives the goods him-

self, he takes care of their safety and checks their sale; he keeps his books accurately, and often compares his cash balance with his accounts. His vigilance eliminates the causes of loss, and adds to the number of opportunities for making a profit. Whilst ruin enters surreptitiously into the dwelling of the careless man who neglects his affairs, fortune awaits him whose careful eye provides for everything.

It is the same in the sphere of morality. Self-examination is the safeguard in it for the most sacred interests of the soul.

It is, indeed, by the examination of his conscience that a man enters into his own heart. There he is the witness of the feelings that arise, of the passions which disturb him, and of the failings that bring humiliation upon him; he sees the good aspirations that come to grief, and the bad impulses that get the upper hand; and, aware of his wretchedness, and also of his strength, he knows both what to dread and what he may hope for.

And this knowledge agitates and arouses him, and makes him form

good resolutions. For, however low he may have fallen, there is still within him a deep instinct, which is inherent in his nature, and which protests against what is wrong. It is, indeed, an echo of the voice of God that reverberates in a man's conscience when he is overtaken with remorse at the sight of the sins that he has committed or of the failings into which he has fallen. If so many people daze themselves with dissipation in order not to hear such reproaches as these, and if they flee from themselves in order not to perceive the stains in their own hearts, it is because they wish to evade the painful effort of reaction that a sight of their wretchedness would stimulate in their souls. Thus act those sick people who avoid getting to know their own true condition, in order to spare themselves the anxiety of the medical treatment which a clear knowledge of their danger would force them to undergo.

The examination of conscience is not in itself a remedy for the ills of the soul. But it effectively invites the soul to take the remedy that will cure it.

II

The Use of the Examination of Conscience

The most skilful masters of the spiritual life, and especially St. Ignatius Loyola, considering piety as a means of moral progress, have placed the examination of conscience among the most essential of the exercises of the pious life. In cases of sickness and of overwhelming occupation, they allow the putting on one side of vocal prayer, and even of interior prayer, but they ask that the examination of conscience should never be omitted, so sure are they that the examination of conscience can make good for all the rest, and that nothing else can make up for the want of it.

Some pious people, who have a habit of recollection and are attentive to the inner motions of their hearts, easily dispense with fixed hours of self-examination and with definite subject-matter for it. They are wrong, and deprive themselves of a great source of aid; for this

general view of their conscience, without any definite point, is utterly wanting in moral effectiveness. In this vague cognizance that they take of themselves, they do not get an idea of what they are wanting in, and they do not derive from this hazy view of themselves a victorious impulse towards what is good.

Anyone who looks to piety for the moral strength to lead a better life should therefore settle for himself every day a time to be set apart for the examination of his conscience. It will be, at any rate, in the evening, at the hour of prayer with which the day closes; and in communities which are fervent, they add to this the recollection at midday.

Examination of conscience is only real, and brings forth fruit, on condition of having a definite object. To enter into one's own house is well; but to be satisfied with going round it with a hasty glance is to run the risk of seeing nothing in it. To find out what is out of order, it is necessary to scour a few corners every day, sometimes one and sometimes another. How many houses, to all appearance well kept, reveal

serious shortcomings if some one part of them is scanned with close and continued observation.

In an examination of conscience, the eyes of the soul will first of all look in the direction of one's dominant fault; for there it is that the chief gaps in the moral life appear. And if some are so far ignorant of themselves as not to know what their dominant failing is, they can either watch their own disposition, of which it is usually the natural product, or else ask their spiritual director, who will quickly perceive in their habitual faults what is their most harmful tendency.

This principal tendency, which rules the whole of the life, is outwardly expressed in act and word, but after having aroused complex movements within. Those who are only beginning, and who are so far but little trained to catch and repress their inmost thoughts and feelings, will first of all keep watch over words and acts which afford more tangible material for examination, and over these the will has a greater hold. But with practice, attention will turn by degrees from without

to within, and will discover defects to be corrected in their very source, and will suppress them before they have had time to come out into the open.

There is then an order to be kept in this moral strategy, the object of which is the conquest of self. If sensualism is a serious check to virtue, it must be the primary objective of our attack. As soon as the flesh has been nearly subdued, the hours of the day must be rescued from being arranged by caprice; for he who is master of his time has acquired a great amount of strength. Then will come the art, which St. James declares to be so important and so difficult, of governing one's tongue, so that it shall not trip in uttering hurtful or inconsiderate words, such as offend against charity or good taste.

Whatever may be the matter of our self-examination, it must be done under the eyes of God, and in utter sincerity of soul. Piety will preside over it, either because it calls for divine enlightenment by prayer, or else because, at the end, it implores for grace and strength to overcome

evil. Straightforwardness, too, has its part to play, both in driving away delusions that might hide the soul's weaknesses from the search, and to prevent dissimulation from closing the lips against making the indispensable avowals.

Happy are those who examine themselves straightforwardly, judge themselves strictly, and correct themselves faithfully! They are in the way of salvation.

CHAPTER X

SPIRITUAL RETREATS

I

The Advantage of a Retreat

THE spiritual retreat, during the last three centuries, has become an important instrument in the Christian life. Priests and faithful prepare themselves in a retreat for the salient circumstances of their lives; the Bishop, for his consecration; the clergy, for their ordination; the religious, for their profession; the young, for the choice of their calling; and children, for their first communion. In addition to these solemn occasions, retreats have been introduced, in the course of the years as they go by, as regular halting-places, where, after a laborious stage has been passed, we like to take recuperative rest, either at the end of every month, or at least at the end of each year; sometimes

even, in fervent communities, a prolonged retreat brings with it the blessing of a second novitiate.

If the spiritual retreat has taken such a place in Christian practice, whether amongst the religious or amongst priests, it must be because experience has made them recognize its invaluable advantages. It is because honest souls come forth all renewed from these pious exercises that they have been adopted as the highest means of moral regeneration by all associations of the religious. Bishops have gladly seen the faith and zeal of their priests revived in them ; directors of seminaries, during these blessed seasons, have witnessed the richest growth of priestly virtues in the hearts of the younger clergy ; superiors of communities perceive that the divine spirit always revives religious fervour during the retreat ; and lastly, in the world, how many souls which had gone astray have returned to the right path, how many hardened sinners have been transformed, how many sick hearts have been healed, thanks to the holy exercises of a retreat gone through with sincerity !

And how can the retreat be otherwise than beneficent, since it procures for the soul which gives itself up to it the contemplation of eternal truths, the prolonged examination of its own conscience, and urgent and overpowering appeals of God's grace?

Eternal truths usually hold so small a place in our thoughts! Our attention is fascinated by the objects that surround us, limited to the horizons of earth, and not drawn towards the long vistas of the hereafter; our ears are filled with the noises of this world, deafened with the clamour of all kinds of interests, and do not listen to the words of God.

Now come the hours of the silence and solitude of the retreat; then let the whole world vanish from before our eyes, and the cries of earth be dumb around us. Immediately light from on high reaches us and draws our soul heavenwards, the voice of God echoes in our conscience, and makes us listen to the divine appeals. The great lesson which we then learn is that of the nothingness and of the worth of life. Life is nothing, so short is it, as compared with eternity

which never ends. Life is of infinite worth, nevertheless, if, indeed, we regard it as a preparation for an eternity of happiness or of damnation. If life be nothing, why should we become attached to it, and why should we be so wanting in patience amidst the sorrows and labours which will so soon come to an end? If life be the short time for the great trial in which each one has to win his place in eternity, what madness it is to waste the hours of it! What a missing of the mark to spend them in doing ill! On the contrary, is it not the highest wisdom to sow, while here below, in labour and tears, the rich harvests of eternity? Indeed, how poor seems the earth in itself to him who has his eyes on heaven! But, on the other hand, how beautiful is it in the eyes of those who plough the furrow in which the seed of eternal felicity is to spring forth!

In the same way, man forgets his own heart when carried away with the rush of his daily business. Everything takes him outside of himself; he knows neither what he does nor what he wants; his soul escapes from his control, and, if he is not careful,

it may become the victim of terrible and unforeseen occurrences.

But if, by means of a retreat, he gets free from the whirl of business and affairs; if, alone and by himself, he practises recollection in solitude; then, immediately he recovers himself, he enters into his own conscience, and he is able to take account of what he is; for his soul will quite spontaneously reveal itself to him, even to the very depths. He sees what notions haunt his mind and govern his life, and whether they are thoughts of heaven or of earth, whether they are suggested by faith and reason, or by the more tainted sources of the world and the senses. He fathoms his heart, and tries the worth of the affections implanted in it, to see whether they are such as elevate the soul or such as lower it by bringing it into bondage. He measures the strength of his will, estimates its faults and failings, reckons up its defeats, and compares them with the victories too rarely won. He then knows what is the condition of his soul; if it is in a state of defilement or of sin, he will make an effort to get rid of it; if it

is in a state of lukewarmness, he will bring it back to fervour; if it is in a state of loyalty to duty, he will thank God and ask for the grace to be still more sanctified.

Lastly, the world is a place in which there blows an icy wind, the cold blasts of which check the springing up of virtues; the most generous lives in the long run experience a fatal falling away in it, unless, from time to time, they renew their vigour in a warmer atmosphere.

This bracing air, in which the moral life regains strength, is found in the retreat, which surrounds the faithful soul with it. There, in fact, reigns divine grace; it is a paradise, in which God is the sun, shedding floods of light and warmth. Under the influence of these beams from on high, good desires germinate, ardent prayers have their birth, and generous resolutions ripen and give the promise of a harvest of holy works. After spending several days in the forcing heat of this divine life, man is happily overcome by grace, and leaves the retreat purified, enlightened, resolute and better equipped.

II

Conditions of Success of a Retreat

The retreat, however, only produces these happy results on certain conditions; it must be begun with confidence, and in it one must give oneself up to the greatest solitude, and to great interior activity.

Confidence is the first condition of success. Do not say: "I have made so many retreats, and so often they have borne no fruit! What is the use of making any efforts in the one I am about to begin? I shall not be able to persevere any better this time than I have done in the past." This is a hurtful way of reasoning, suggested by spiritual idleness, and its effect is to paralyze the endeavours of a good will. Rather say: "It is true that I have been unfaithful to my good resolutions, and that, after the fine impulses of religious fervour, I fell back into a spiritless lukewarmness, and perhaps even into sin. At any rate, I had purified my soul, I had made good all its energies, and I performed acts of virtue which will

count for heaven. If I could only succeed in rekindling for a time the Christian life in the depths of my soul, if I could only have the joy of finding once more the presence of my God for a few weeks, certainly the result would be well worth the effort. But I have a right to expect something better. This retreat will, perhaps, be the last one in my life; how should I begrudge it, at the hour of my death, if I had missed it! Besides, some special grace of God is awaiting me in it. How ungrateful should I be, if I were not to respond to it! If I do my part in this work which is about to begin, and in which God goes before me, I shall obtain from it inestimable fruits of life. To God's advances, then, I will answer with unsparing generosity."

This good-will, to which one should stir oneself up at the outset, would be barren, if one did not immerse one's soul in the deepest solitude. Silence so far as the world is concerned, and silence in the soul itself. From outside, let there be neither communications nor visits, letters nor speech, during the retreat; let the world be to us as if non-existent; let

God only be present to us, and let us have to do with Him alone, so far as the great interests of our life are concerned; let us be persuaded that all that interrupts this silence from men or things will interfere with the action of God to our very great loss. So far as the soul is concerned, let there be silence too; let all thoughts of the world be shut out of the mind, let even the most lawful affections of the heart be dumb; the soul can only give its attention to God when the mind has recovered all its clearness and the heart all its liberty. This silence, which is so essential to divine action, is not gained in a single day; distracting voices are only hushed by degrees, and in those souls alone who are determined to effect this beneficent isolation in themselves.

But this solitude is not a wilderness in which the soul is able to give itself up to a drowsy idleness. The maker of a retreat only isolates himself in order to be free to be with God, and he only seeks this liberty to apply himself to strenuous toil. He awakens the activity of his mind by converse to which he listens with

eagerness, and by deliberately selected readings with which he fills up his valuable time. He sets his heart in motion with earnest prayers, vocal prayers which he multiplies in order to kindle his fervour, mental prayers that bring him into intimate union with God. He arouses his will to make resolutions for a better life, first by a humble confession of sins to the priest, and then by an intelligent preparation of a scheme of life which he draws up, taking account of the extent of his strength and of the needs of his soul.

From these retreats, with their silence and activity, the Christian comes forth all illumined with heavenly gifts, all steeped in divine graces, so that his piety, renewed in its source, afterwards manifests itself, as it should, in a holier life.

CONCLUSION

A PRAYER FOR THE GRACE OF PIETY

O GOD, who art unseen, but whom my reason acknowledges to be present to my whole being, and whom my faith makes me feel in my heart; O good God, who wast graciously pleased not only to give me the precious gift of life, but hast taught me how to use it so as to win eternal happiness; O generous God, prodigal of Thyself, who, by Thy grace, impartest Thine own life to those who pray unto Thee; condescend, in Thy mercy, to awaken me to a knowledge of what Thou art to me and of what I should be to Thee, so that I may not go through the time of trial on earth with blinded eyes and idle hands; let me never be enticed away by deceitful vanities, base pleasures, and vain riches, nor by mad ambition, for fear that I should let my thoughts

and desires be made captive by the narrow confines of the world; rather stamp my whole being with an impress of the love that gives rise to piety, in order that, passing beyond the narrow borders of things visible, I may enter by faith into the pure regions of things invisible, which thou fillest with Thy majesty and animatest with Thy life; grant, Lord, that my mind may be enlightened by the contemplation of eternal truths, that my heart may glow with their pure flames on coming into contact with the burning fuel of Thy holy love, and that my will may obtain invincible energy from the infinite stores of Thy omnipotence; and, without losing the joys of the intimate union with Thee that comes from prayer, I shall return transfigured to the work which has been given me to do here below; I shall be more attentive to the duties of my state of life, more patient and more kindly with my fellows, more resigned in sorrow and more zealous in forwarding Thy interests, so that the world may learn, O good and dear Master, from my example, not only that Thou

loadest with happiness those who love Thee, but, above all, that by pious intercourse with Thee, one grows better, that the faithful Christian becomes one of the elect for eternity in proportion as he is more truly a man while living in time; and that, in consequence, it is in Thee that we must seek, O my God, the grace to grow and to become useful.

THE END

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